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THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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In an Old Fashioned glass, combine the sugar, water and Angostura® bitters with a bar spoon. Next, add half the BACARDÍ 8 Años along with 2-3 large ice cubes, stirring repeatedly. Pour in the second half of the rum and 2-3 more ice cubes, continuing to stir. Cut a piece of orange peel (~5 cm long); express the orange peel over the drink, releasing the citrus oils; drop the peel into the drink to finish.



THE BACARDÍ MAESTRO COLLINS

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MAESTRO DE RON RUM
- 1 PART FRESHLY SQUEEZED LEMON JUICE
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- TO FILL: SODA OR SPARKLING WATER

Pour the BACARDÍ Gran Reserva Maestro de Ron, lemon juice and caster sugar into a cocktail shaker with cubes of ice and then give it a good, hard shake. Fine strain the mixture into a Collins glass with ice and top with soda. Finish by garnishing it with a lemon peel.

LIVE PASSIONATELY. DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

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GIULIA



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ON THE COVER

Steve Harvey turned a knack for humor into a vast career.
photograph by David Yellen

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The minute-repeater, a watch that chimes the time at the wearer's behest, has challenged watchmakers for centuries.

cigars

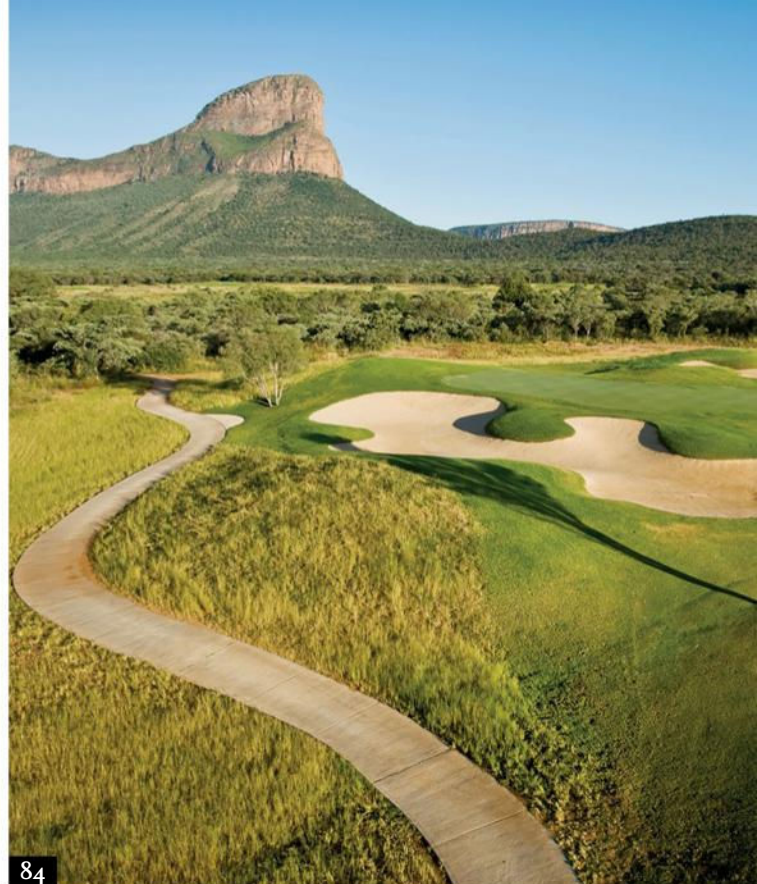
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84



98



106

highlights

Many believe that there is no better time than now to be a cigar lover, and with 30 cigars scoring 90 points or higher in our most recent taste test, it's hard to argue against this sentiment. One smoke, though, stood out: Cuba's Cohiba Esplendido, which rated a whopping 95 points in our blind review—a classic score for a classic brand. If you can't get your hands on the famous Churchill, plenty of smokes from other countries scored well in this tasting. Two 93-pointers from Nicaragua topped the figurado and corona gorda categories, while three cigars, one Honduran and two Cubans, tied at 92 points to lead the robustos. Meanwhile, six cigars in the panetela group scored 91 points. If you enjoy data, check out our story that breaks down all of the cigars we rated in 2016 on page 133.



TOP CHURCHILL COHIBA ESPLENDIDO

One of Cohiba's earliest commercial sizes, this Churchill is said to use tobaccos from the island's Vuelta Abajo growing region.

CUBA

95



TOP CORONA GORDA JOYA DE NICARAGUA BLACK NOCTURNO

This blend features a Mexican San Andrés wrapper, marking the first time ever that the oldest Nicaraguan cigar manufacturer has used such a leaf.

NICARAGUA

93



TOP FIGURADO PADRÓN 6000 MADURO

It may be hard to spot this dark torpedillo in a crowded humidor, but with a retail price of less than \$10, the hunt is worth it.

NICARAGUA

93



TOP ROBUSTO CAO ITALIA CIAO

The filler of this smoke includes leaf from Italy, a rarity in premium, handmade cigars.

HONDURAS

92



TOP LONSDALE ROMEO Y JULIETA RESERVA REAL LONSDALE

This slim smoke is covered in a gorgeous, tan Connecticut-seed wrapper grown in the fields of Ecuador, and is stronger than it looks.

DOM. REP.

91



TOP PANETELA LA PALINA ILLUMINATION LANCERO

Made in Miami's El Titan de Bronze factory, this cigar incorporates high-priming ligero in its blend. It tied with five other panetelas.

U.S.A.

91



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Choosing a Cover

Selecting who goes on the cover of CIGAR AFICIONADO is a task we take quite seriously. The cover image is the flag we fly on newsstands, and the person (or people) we put on that cover becomes our ambassador for two months. With only six issues a year, there aren't many opportunities to be on our cover.

The ideal candidate is someone who enjoys fine cigars. Sometimes our cover subjects puff on occasion, and once in a while we find someone who smokes cigars as often (and with as much passion) as we do.

Inspiration comes in all forms. We seek out many people. Others seek us out. Some we know. And there are those whom we pursue aggressively. The man on the cover of the issue you are reading—Steve Harvey—came to us in the strangest fashion of all: via another magazine that no one would ever confuse with CIGAR AFICIONADO.

People magazine.

We came across a video posted on *People's* Facebook page last summer, made when Harvey was due to appear on the June 6 cover of that magazine. Harvey and his wife, Marjorie Bridges-Woods, are seen giving a tour of their palatial house in Atlanta. As they show off a grand outdoor kitchen, Harvey mentions cigars. "Usually this is happening with a cigar," he says. Soon, he's puffing away on one. He talks about cigars again and again throughout the video and takes the viewer on a tour of his closet, which is loaded with golf clubs, plenty of clothes and an array of humidors brimming with his favorite smokes, Cuban and non-Cuban alike.

And then came the line that we couldn't ignore, uttered without his trademark smile, his brow furrowed and his attitude clearly one of disappointment:

"Can't get on the cover of CIGAR AFICIONADO," he mutters.

We had put Steve Harvey on the inside of the magazine in August 2005. Never on the cover. His people had reached out recently, but it just didn't work out. Now the man was spending his time being interviewed by another magazine, but lobbying to be on the cover of ours.

It was time.

Harvey is a busy man, hosting several TV and radio shows and crisscrossing the United States to keep up with his schedule. Cigars are his constant companion. He made headlines in January when he met with President Donald J. Trump (who was then president-elect), when he was asked to lend a hand with problems facing America's inner cities.

Harvey is a man of wealth and fame today, and he owes his success to a great leap of faith he made many years ago when he quit his job after winning a comedy competition. He was so enamored of being on stage and making people laugh that he left a paying job behind after winning all of \$50. No one but his father believed in him, and times were so lean at one point that he was living in his car and bathing in public pools. His story of extraordinary drive and success begins on page 48.

So Steve Harvey, welcome to the CIGAR AFICIONADO cover club. You've earned it.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

DAVID SAVONA
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rocky  Patel

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CARRILLO

cigar aficionado

#4

Cigar
of the
Year

2016



Selección
OSCURO

out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

As a charter subscriber to CIGAR AFICIONADO in 1992, I've observed over the past quarter century that Cuban cigars have become less dominant in the top ratings every issue, mainly due to product from Nicaragua and/or the Dominican Republic. The best-tasting cigars I ever purchased were a box of Cuban H. Upmann No. 2s in 1994 from the Davidoff store in London. Some of the most mediocre to awful cigars I've ever purchased have also been Cuban Upmann No. 2s over subsequent decades from Davidoff stores in Canada and Mexico. I'd like to think they weren't counterfeit, given my modicum of expertise as a consumer and Davidoff's reputation.

So part of me had hoped that Gordon Mott's article in the February 2017 issue, "The New Rules on Cuban Cigars," was going to be a primer on which Cuban cigars were now worth the premium price. After reading it, I understand the thrust being the recent relaxation of import rules for U.S. citizens bringing Cuban cigars purchased abroad into this country.

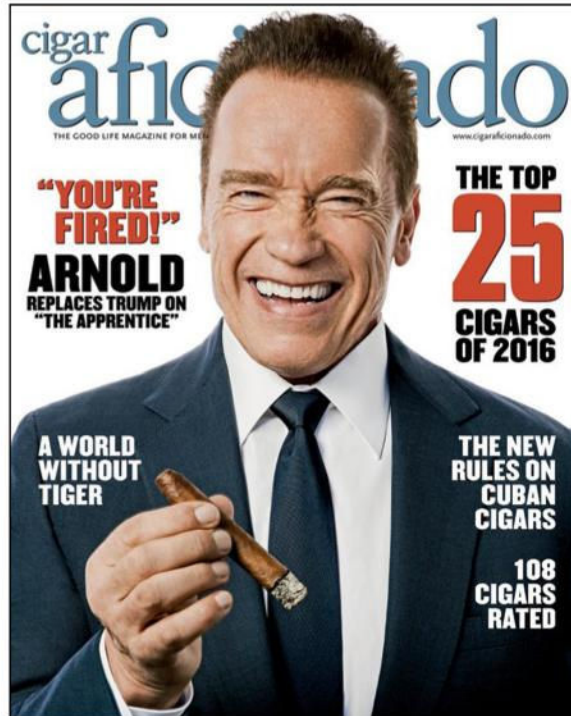
That said, and given the incomparable experience that CIGAR AFICIONADO has on the quality of Cuban cigars, it occurs to me that you would be doing your readers a tremendous service with an article chronicling the evolution and quality of Cuban cigar tobacco over the past 20 or so years. My experience has led me to the theory that a declining Cuban economy over this period, combined with the need to provide government-subsidized cigarette rations to the Cuban populace, has resulted in more tobacco being diverted to cigarette production and less for higher-quality cigar manufacturing. Bolstering this theory is the Castro-mandated cessation of subsidized rations to those citizens born after 1956 in the past few years.

Whatever the case, my question (and request for insight from your publication) becomes: Does the average Cuban cigar today remain the Holy Grail for smokers of fine cigars, thereby justifying the continued mystique and premium price?

David B. Kee Jr. M.D.

Pinehurst, North Carolina

Editors' Response: A superb question. If you turn to Greg Mottola's analysis on page 133, you will see how Cubans rated collectively as a country against cigars from Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere in our 2016 blind tastings in CIGAR AFICIONADO and Cigar Insider, our twice-monthly newsletter about cigars. The short answer is: quite well. However, there are great Cuban cigars, there



“Does the average Cuban cigar today remain the Holy Grail for smokers of fine cigars, thereby justifying the mystique and premium price?”

—David B. Kee Jr. M.D., Pinehurst, North Carolina

are good Cuban cigars and there are poor Cuban cigars. A cigar smoker would be misinformed indeed if he or she thought that picking up any cigar of Cuban origin would guarantee a great smoke. Just because a cigar is Cuban doesn't mean it will be of high quality.

Dear Marvin,

Thank you for the Editors' Note "Government Meddling at its Worst" [December 2016]. The abusive burden placed on many businesses by the outgoing U.S. federal administration is only one reason for the result of the 2016 presidential election. As with the abuse of Gibson Guitar Co., the overreach by meddling administration minions crippled many hard-working business owners and their children for years to come. Now it is the agribusiness of cigar manufacturing that is being targeted by the outgoing abusive socialist. One address to the abusive burden is noted in the Declaration of Independence: "He has erected a

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multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.” In CIGAR AFICIONADO we read the cry of a free business republic restating the declaration so noted more than 200 years ago. Such rejection of administration socialist overreach is now made witness with the county-by-county majority vote of the republic. We see this past vote unseating dozens and dozens of tax-spend-and-regulate socialist politicians in D.C. and across the United States.

Remember, without protected open economic commerce there can be no other freedom; because the fertilization of free conduct is in the financial ability of the individual to act upon a desire.

To enjoy a fine cigar is an opportunity for repose. Hand-rolled cigars made by hard-working members of the business community need not be vilified by federal or state administration. Such jackbooted conduct by the outgoing administration is a reminder of those words so stated in the Declaration of Independence. Yes, in the 2016 elections U.S. citizens rejected the abusive communist platform in favor of freedom. At hand is the freedom of those boutique businesses and the unfettered opportunity for the ineffable right of the individual to go about enjoying life in even the most simple of things as a good hand-rolled cigar.

To that end, many rejoice for the rejection of the communist abuse. Rejection now is enforced by a peaceful voting process and not a second heavy blood sacrifice like that paid more than 200 years ago. On a personal note, I am grateful CIGAR AFICIONADO continues to champion the simple pleasure of an individual to select and enjoy a fine cigar.

*J. Bradley Oakes
Milpitas, California*

Dear Marvin,

The only way [your Arnold Schwarzenegger photo shoot] would get any better [“You’re Fired,” February 2017] is if he was holding a rifle in one arm, flexing the bicep with the other arm while on the tank, with the cigar in his mouth. That would be just too much.

*Joshua Hackett
Via Facebook*

Dear Marvin,

Your December issue was exceptional, covering all the bases: travel, cigars, chefs, etc. Good work!

*Fred Rambeau
Hammond, Louisiana*

Correction: The Q&A with Fernando Domínguez published in the December 2016 issue listed the incorrect headquarters for Imperial Brands PLC. The company is headquartered in Bristol, United Kingdom.

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Corojo 99, 25% Havana 2000 • Binder: Quilali • Filler: Nicaragua, Honduras, Brazil
Short Churchill: 6 x 48 - Robusto Extra: 5 1/2 x 52 - Toro: 6 x 54 - Gordo: 6 1/2 x 58



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Patriots' owner Robert Kraft offers a Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series cigar to receiver Chris Hogan after New England's historic Super Bowl win.

Victory Cigars For Patriots After Super Bowl

What do you do when your team converts a come-from-behind victory in one of the greatest games ever played? If you're Patriots' owner Robert Kraft, you hand out great cigars.

Super Bowl LI certainly qualified for such a cigar moment. Tom Brady cemented his standing among the NFL's greatest with a stunning second-half comeback and a game-winning drive in overtime to claim his fifth Super Bowl ring and fourth MVP accolade. Records abounded. It was the first Super Bowl to go to overtime, the greatest comeback ever staged in the NFL's biggest game, a record for most rings by a starting Super Bowl quarterback (Brady earned one for the thumb) as well as for head coach Bill Belichick, New England's fearless leader.

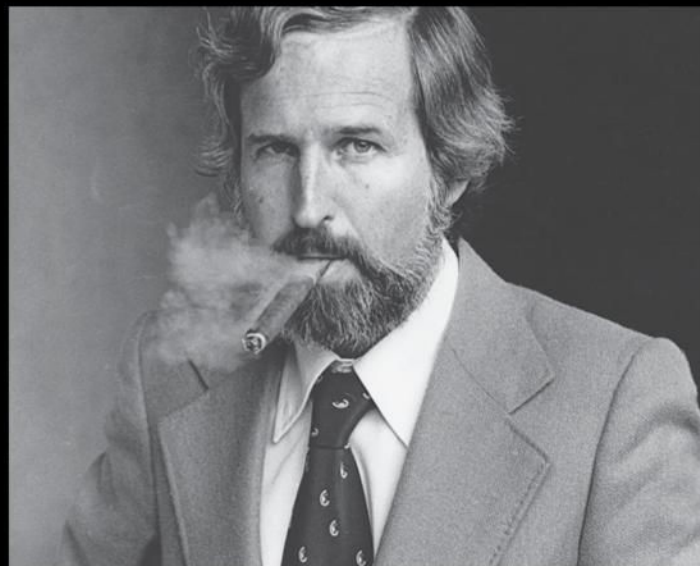
Kraft has more than his share of Super Bowl experience, so it should come as no surprise that he came to Houston's NRG Stadium with a well-chosen victory cigar: the Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series. Padrón has won CIGAR AFICIONADO'S Cigar of the Year award a record three times.

A video posted to Twitter by NFL.com's Dan Hanzus showed a jovial Kraft handing out the Padróns in the locker room. The final visit on his walk was to step up to Brady, who threw for 466 yards (yet another record) and two touchdowns. The star QB embraced Kraft, but he seemed more concerned with his missing Super Bowl jersey than picking up a cigar.

—Blake Driesch



Tom Brady led his New England Patriots in the biggest comeback in Super Bowl history, throwing for 466 yards and two touchdowns.



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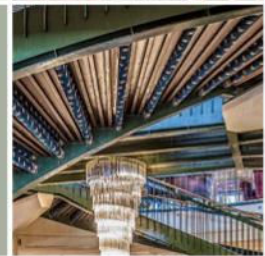
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good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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Adorini Travel Humidor Cedro

Long gone are the days where all men traveled in style. Some may have ditched their sport coats and loafers to jet-set in sweatshirts and flip-flops, but that doesn't mean cigars should have to slum it. These are handmade indulgences—crafted with excruciating attention to detail—so why would you choose to encase them in a travel humidor that has the aesthetic appeal of a Tupperware container?

That's why humidor crafters like Germany's Adorini create scaled-down versions of larger designs. Its Travel Humidor Cedro (\$121) is made especially for on-the-go use. Adorini's Cedro collection strays from the lacquered finishes found on most humidors, instead using a natural Spanish cedar veneer. Most cigar smokers know Spanish cedar for its appealing aroma and ability to hold moisture, which make it a popular choice for humidor linings. The Cedro humidor also takes advantage of the wood's low density and resistance to weathering with an exterior that is lightweight and durable—ideal features in a travel humidor.

But one does not create a functioning travel humidor simply by downsizing. Subtle reinforcements must be made for extra protection and accessibility. On the outside, Adorini has added a gold-plated button

lock that ensures a firm seal and obviates the key-lock feature present on the larger Cedro designs.

Open the humidor and you will find two snug foam inserts designed to keep your cigars in place during transit. The inserts can hold 13 cigars—one mold fits eight cigars vertically, the other holds five longer smokes horizontally. While some travel humidors employ foam padding in a way that significantly restricts space, the Adorini humidor has some added depth to the inside lid, so both inserts can be used at the same time.

Should you no longer require the reinforcements once you've arrived at your destination or if you fancy a certain vitola that doesn't fit the mold (some long and thin cigars don't), simply remove them and place your cigars directly on the cedar interior. Without the foam inserts, the capacity is roughly 12 to 15 cigars, depending on size.

The Travel Humidor Cedro measures 10 1/4 by 7 1/4 inches, with a depth of about 1 1/4 inches. It's the smallest in the Cedro collection, which has three other sizes with capacities between 30 and 150 cigars.

Visit adorini.com

—Blake Droesch

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2017 Lincoln Continental

Few automotive brands have taken a harder fall than Lincoln. Once a force to be reckoned with, Ford's high-line marque has been little more than an asterisk on the sales charts in recent decades. The arrival of the compact MKC crossover, a couple years back, showed there's still some life left, but the real test is about to begin with the rebirth of the brand's flagship, the once venerated Lincoln Continental.

The 2017 model-year marks the first time the Continental nameplate has been seen in a Lincoln showroom since 2002. It also marks a shift away from forgettable alphanumeric designations like MKX, MKT and MKS (with the new Continental replacing the latter model). The 2017 sedan is more than just an MKS update—it's a complete makeover. True, it shares the same, basic architecture as the mundane, midsize Ford Fusion, but it's longer, wider and loaded with the sort of luxury features you'd expect. This includes the sophisticated infotainment and safety technologies that are today as much the definition of luxury as natural-finish woods and plush, semi-aniline leather seats, as well as a 30-way heated and cooled driver's seat.

The Continental made its debut in stunning concept form at the 2015 New York Auto Show. The production model isn't quite as exotic, but it's still a handsome vehicle with a more formal presence than other recent Lincoln offerings, that ensures you'll get noticed, with an all-new grille design, distinctive electric door handles and Bentley-esque rear fenders.

Lincoln has taken hits from some reviewers who can't seem to take a front-wheel-drive luxury car seriously. Like Audi, Ford engineers work

around that problem by offering the all-wheel-drive option we drove paired with a 400-horsepower twin-turbo V-6, one of three available powertrains. It's not the fastest car off the line, but performance is nonetheless impressive, hitting 60 in barely five seconds. Handling is solid, especially considering the Conti's nearly 4,600-pound mass. No, it's not a BMW, but it does have its advantages.

Lincoln execs like to call it "Quiet Luxury," and that's more than a marketing slogan. The Continental may be understated, but it delivers what many high-line buyers want. That's especially true with the Black Label model we drove. It's tomb-quiet until you turn up the studio-quality Revel audio package. There's also the latest Sync infotainment system, which includes Alexa, the Amazon digital assistant. Use it to open the garage door, turn on your houselights or check weather and sports scores. The Black Label badge gets you more than just upgraded seats and finishes. You also get a suite of services, including an at-the-ready concierge, along with free pickup and delivery, as well as a loaner, when you need service.

All in all, the 2017 Lincoln Continental is an impressive piece of machinery that will no longer get lost in the crowd or have you apologizing for your choice in luxury sedans. With a price starting around \$45,000—but pushing up to \$79,000 in loaded Black Label trim—it's the sort of flagship that should help put Lincoln back on the radar after years in limbo.

Visit lincoln.com/continental

— Paul A. Eisenstein

[illegible]

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The Classic Jean Jacket

It's called the trucker jacket, but it might just as well have been dubbed the biker, the rebel, the protester, the hippie, the rocker or any other name that says counterculture chic. The Levi's denim jacket was born as work wear, but found its true niche when worn by such brooding antiheroes as James Dean, Steve McQueen and the Marlboro Man. They made it a permanent part of the American wardrobe by exuding cool (not chores) and hinting at danger (not drudgery).

The first Levi's jacket evolved from denim work shirts manufactured by the San Francisco company that made rugged jeans popular in the Old West. In 1905, Levi's debuted a boxy jacket, with one breast pocket and a belt in the small of the back to cinch it. Minor changes followed until, in 1953, a second coming brought two breast pockets and button adjusters at the waist in place of the back belt. Bar-tack stitching had by then replaced rivets on the pockets. More form-fitting, this was the jacket first associated with motorcycle clubs and cinematic juvies.

A scant 10 years later the design would near its fashion zenith with a slimmer version. The trucker—collar turned up and the sleeves slightly rolled—became a go-to rebel garment. Not only was it cut tighter, but details like chest seams that descended from the pockets to the waist in a

V-shape, as well as pointed flaps, accentuated the trim lines. The material was a bit heavier and made of preshrunk denim, meaning you could wash it over and over to get the lived-in look.

If there was any way to give this jacket more attitude, Levi's found it in the '80s when it added hand pockets just above the waist. Now you could tuck your digits away and affect total indifference.

Not that Levi's has a monopoly on the look. Plenty of designers have even sent denim jackets down the runway, either in the classic form or with variations. (Probably the most disturbing are the suit jackets made of denim. Levi's itself made a tuxedo version for the very uncool Bing Crosby.) If you're considering alternatives don't forget that details like sturdy stitching and copper shank buttons with working holes—not snaps—make this look. While you can get it in colors other than the classic indigo blue, a timeworn way to make the look your own is to personalize it with tie-dye or embroidery (à la the hippie culture) or, at the other end of the spectrum, Hell's Angels patches. Bruce Springsteen styled them as vests by ditching the sleeves. The look never suffered in the least.

Visit levi.com

—Jack Bettridge

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Burr Coffee Grinders

You call yourself a coffee connoisseur yet you're still slashing away at your gourmet beans with a blade grinder? Time to abandon the coffee philistines and step up to a burr grinder.

It's not coffee hubris or snobbery that demands the change, but a couple of very compelling reasons that dictate the quality of your brew. Firstly, coffee from a burr grinder tastes better because it's actually ground, not hacked. A blade grinder doesn't really grind so much as it slices and chops each roasted bean over and over again. This creates lots of heat and alters the taste of your coffee considerably. Burr grinders, by comparison, operate on steel burrs, bladed rings that rotate in opposite directions to quickly crush and grind each coffee bean with minimal friction. This milling method will release complex flavors that you've been missing all these years—everything from caramel and fruit to cocoa and fudge.

The other issue is granular consistency. On its best day, a blade grinder will still give you a mixed range of grounds—some fine, some coarse, some medium, all in the same tablespoon. You don't want that. The crude lack of consistency can seriously affect water flow during extraction, especially in espresso machines. Burr grinders produce grounds of uniform size, making espresso extraction the smooth, rich process it's supposed to be, whether you're using a high-pressure machine or a stove-top mocha pot.

It's common knowledge among coffee aficionados that the Italian company Mazzer manufactures the Rolls Royce of burr grinders. They've been doing it for almost 70 years, but most of their units can be intimidating, as they're intended for industrial use. To satisfy the needs of the *haute* home brewer, Mazzer created the Mazzer Mini (pictured, \$695). The unit fits onto any kitchen counter, yet still delivers all the professional-grade precision required to make a respectable cup of coffee. Its 250-watt motor can spin its burrs at up to 1,600 rpm for quick, uniform grinds of any size. Stepless adjustment means a near infinite amount of settings.

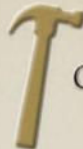
If the Mini is still more performance than you think you'll need, consider the Capresso Infinity conical burr grinder (\$150). Distributed by Jura Inc., this ultracompact machine is powered by a 100-watt motor and calibrated with 16 factory settings ranging from coarse grinds for French press to ultrafine for Turkish coffee, with everything in between.

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—Gregory Mottola





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Rome Cavalieri Hotel

Fewer and fewer places truly put out the welcome mat for those of us who love cigars. Thankfully there is Rome, where the sight of a cigar coming from its case brings more smiles than frowns. And when in Rome, it's hard to find a more cigar-friendly place than the Rome Cavalieri, a gorgeous hotel with stunning views, superior service and a three-star restaurant complete with its own cigar lounge.

The Cavalieri, which is part of the Waldorf-Astoria group of hotels, has a Rome address, but is located outside the ancient walls that defined the city back in the days of the empire. Its location—near the peak of Monte Mario, the tallest hill in the Italian capital—affords a jaw-dropping view of the city's many sights. Ask for a room with a city view and you'll see Rome in all its splendor, from the Pantheon to the Colosseum and the spire of St. Peter's Basilica in nearby Vatican City. The view comes with a trade-off—you'll need to ride 15 or 20 minutes to get to the city proper, and getting a cab or Uber may take some time—but being up and away from the bustle of the city center is a welcome blessing.

The Cavalieri brims with amenities: several pools, a spa with Roman-style baths and steam rooms, even a collection of more than 1,000 pieces of fine art dating back to the 16th century. The grounds are dotted with mature stone pines, towering trees bare of branches up to the canopies that seem sculpted by an artist. The Imperial Club offers a quiet and relaxing place for breakfast, a snack or a glass of prosecco before dinner.

Among several restaurants, the hotel's signature eatery is La Pergola, which holds a Grand Award from *Wine Spectator* magazine (CIGAR AFICIONADO's sister publication) and is the only restaurant in Rome with three Michelin stars. Executive chef Heinz Beck offers two tasting menus, one with 11 courses, the other seven, with such intriguing dishes as John

Dory with citrus fruit steam and filet of venison with chestnut cream. (For a shorter meal, the hotel's L'Uliveto serves an outstanding dish of *cacio e pepe*, the Roman pasta made with Pecorino Romano and copious amounts of black pepper). When you finish your meal, adjourn to the adjacent Cigar Lounge (pictured, top left), which is decorated with 19th-century paintings and features a humidor with a selection of handmade Cubans.

Should you stay at the hotel in August, when La Pergola and its Cigar Lounge are closed for the holiday, simply take your cigar to the balcony (each room at the hotel has one) with a bottle of wine or a cocktail from the well-appointed lobby bar. Light your Cohiba as the moonlight reflects off the stunning white marble far below, puff and contemplate the glory that is Rome.

Visit romecavalieri.com

—David Savona





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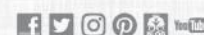


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Wireless Chargers

My iPhone is a child of the 21st century with one 20th century vestige: the power cable. Despite all of Apple's promises of a wireless future—unfettered Internet, payments and headphones—at the end of the day (or before) I find myself scavenging for power outlets, a caveman in Wingtips.

A new generation of wireless charging devices purports to cut the cable. Instead of tethering your phone to an outlet, inductive chargers allow you to rest a receiver on a charging pad. Some phones already include the tech, but most don't, which means you'll need to cobble together the add-ons. Once you have the necessary accoutrement, you'll be wireless—for all of five millimeters, the width of a couple of nickels. Suffice it to say, I was a wireless charging skeptic.

Mophie changed my mind. The California-based company, which makes an array of iPhone cases, jumped into wireless charging last year with an inductive charging case and a series of charging pads for the home, office and car. I got my hands on their Juice Pack Wireless & Charging Base Charging Case (\$99.95) and Charge Force Desk Mount (\$59.95, pictured bottom right), both of which are revelatory, though not in the ways I had anticipated.

The Juice Pack Wireless & Charging Base includes everything you need to inductively charge your iPhone or Samsung Galaxy. The size of a small book and powered by a standard micro USB cable, the charging pad is well-suited for travel. Meanwhile, the charging case adds a little heft to your phone. Charging is simple: you place your phone screen-up on the charging pad, and it magnetically locks into place. Options include a desk mount for easy access and a vent mount for the car.

Still, inductive charging can seem like just a clever party trick. What sold me on Mophie's approach is that it actually extends your phone's wireless capability. Integrated in the case is a small battery that the company claims will add another five to seven hours of usage. I don't know about all of that, but the case did boost my battery life by about 60 percent, which meant that I could get through a day without charging. I was also pleased that I could charge my phone at my local Starbucks, which has adopted the same (Qi) wireless charging specification.

If you just want inductive charging, affordable alternatives abound. The DanForce Qi Wireless Charging Kit Bundle (top right) comes with everything you need to wirelessly charge an iPhone, including an adhesive receiver and charging pad. The receiver looks like something MacGyver would have cooked up, but it's about half the price of a Mophie Juice Pack. The Nillkin N-JARL Wireless Charging Leather (middle right) integrates an inductive receiver into a leather case for about \$10 out the door; the one hitch is that you'll need to purchase some kind of Qi receiver separately.

Inductive charging may not be Star Trek tech, but if it can spare me lugging a power adaptor and a tangle of cable, then beam me up.

Visit danforce.com, mophie.com and nillkin-case.com.

—Will Fenton



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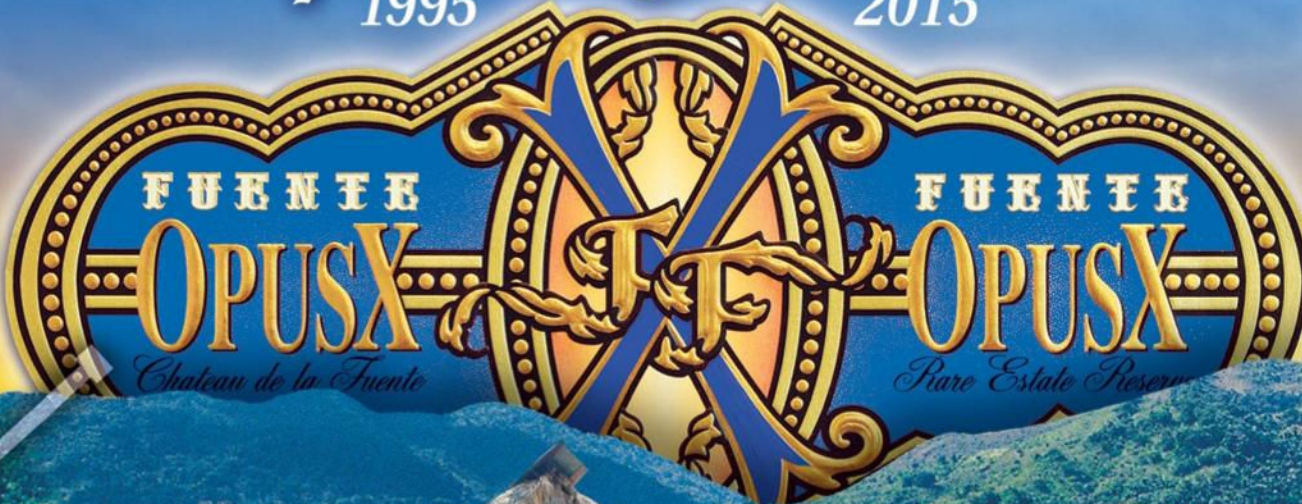
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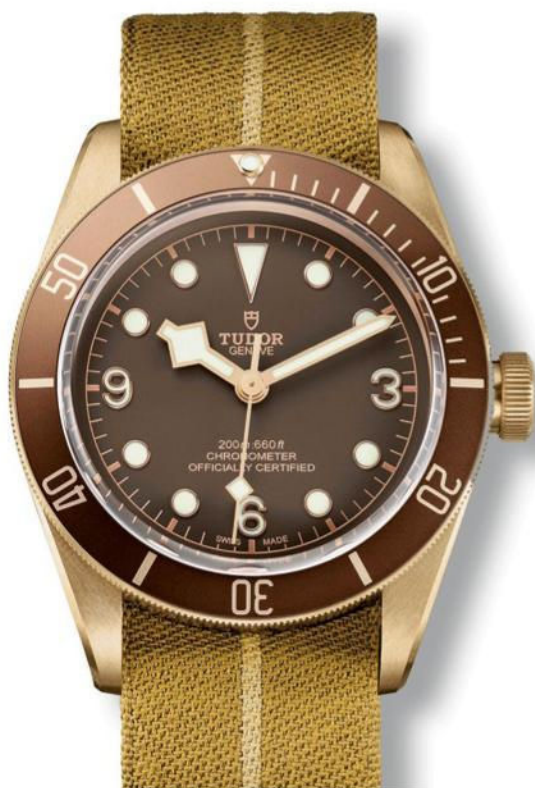
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NATO Straps

As with so much men's wear (and as the name suggests) the NATO-style watch strap traces its casual yet utilitarian roots to military use. Its cold-war debut came in 1973 as the standard-issue strap of the British Ministry of Defence (MoD). Soldiers first dubbed it the G10 after the form used to requisition it. However, the more popular term NATO, referencing the strap's NATO Stocking Number (NSN), stuck.

The original 20-mm-wide woven nylon straps were rather sober, coming only in Admiralty grey. They evolved with stripes as soldiers adopted their regimental colors. The common element was that rather than attaching to the case with spring bars between the lugs, NATO straps passed through the spring bars and under the case, so if one bar failed the watch stayed on the wrist. Extra security came from an additional piece of nylon attached to the buckle. It passed through two metal keepers and then folded back over and tucked under a keeper.

Naturally, designers played with variations on the theme, and NATO has become something of a moniker for the strap style, with some staying true to the originals and others simply channeling the spirit.

For example, the alternate jacquard strap for Tudor's Heritage Black Bay Bronze dive watch (\$3,975, pictured at left) is technically not a NATO, yet it does reference military watches that the brand produced without straps for the French Navy in the 1970s. Navy divers would fit them with straps made from parachute belts, as evidenced by a 1977

model that inspired the brown and beige color scheme. The design is derived from Tudor's first dive watch, 1958's Ref. 7924, nicknamed Big Crown for its prominent winding crown. The MT5601 movement, the brand's first in-house caliber, beats inside the 43-mm case made of an aluminum/bronze alloy that will develop a distinctive patina over time.

Similarly, Oris' retro Divers Sixty-Five (\$1,990 on NATO, center) traces its lineage to a 1965 dive model, one of the brand's first. The collection, launched in 2015, is updated with a handsome deep-green dial and four strap and bracelet options, including a black rubber strap borrowed from Oris' early divers, distressed leather, and a green-and-black-striped NATO.

Meanwhile, Blancpain keeps it real with its latest Fifty Fathoms Bathyscaphe Flyback Chronograph Blancpain Ocean Commitment II (\$20,100, right), an homage to the original 1953 Fifty Fathoms diver. The brand's Blancpain Ocean Commitment initiative, supports marine preservation and exploration while working to raise awareness by sponsoring scientific projects, oceanographic explorations and more. For each watch sold, Blancpain will earmark 1,000 euros to support scientific marine exploration. Limited to 250 pieces, the watch pairs a 43.6-mm satin-brushed blue ceramic case with a subtle dark gray NATO strap, for a handsome watch that looks sharp while on a mission.

Visit tudorwatch.com, oris.ch and blancpain.com

—Laurie Kahle

A GAVE EXPRESSIONISM



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BioMech Acculock ACE putter

That Frank Fornari holds a PhD in molecular pharmacology and toxicology, trained in neurophysiology, clinical medicine, biophysics, mathematical biology, genetics and industrial chemistry, and came up with what might be your next, best putter should come as no surprise. He's founded a number of companies that develop motion analysis systems across a number of disciplines for physical therapy and fitness. His BioMech Golf does the same for golf equipment—like the BioMech Acculock ACE putter.

Fornari recounts: "We decided to take a crack at modeling the putting stroke. What's the ideal way to make a putter go through the impact zone with the proper physiology and physics given USGA regulations and the way your body is built and how it should move. Out of those series of equations and studies came this device as the most efficient solution."

The Acculock ACE is both a putter and a putting system. Its mallet-style has the shaft in the back of the club head. More importantly, the shaft lean is 12 degrees toward the face of the putter. That puts the shoulders in a 12 percent lean from the lead shoulder to the trailing shoulder—optimal for the rotation of the body's core. The club is designed as an "arm-lock" putter—the shaft leaning against the lead forearm. In that style the core muscles do the work.

Fornari had determined that the conventional putting stroke and stance were unnatural, didn't allow for a shoulder turn that would incorporate the core muscles and didn't always position the eyes over the ball and down the line. He felt that incorporating the core muscles of the body and relying less on the arms and hands would make for a more repeatable and accurate stroke.

The Acculock system calls for a stance that is quite narrow and slightly open, with the head directly over the ball and the eyes looking directly down the intended line, automatically (well, with some practice).

"The hand and arms connect the club to the core. The putter is designed so that the core movement of the body and not so much the hands and arms can determine the stroke length," says Fornari. "Not only will you make more putts, but your misses will be better."

And, ergonomically, the \$280 putter is designed to be better for you physically. "The traditional putting stance is a terrible position for your body to be in constantly, especially while practicing," says Fornari. "Our putter puts you more upright in a healthier position for your back."

Make more putts and feel healthier doing it? According to Fornari, the science (and a trial study of players) say "yes."

Visit biomechsports.com

—Jeff Williams





Irish Whiskey Cocktails

Judging by the numbers—Irish whiskey sales are soaring and distillery expansion has revived the island's production—revelers are ready to celebrate with more than just green beer this St. Patrick's Day. The Irish cocktail list is ever expanding and now goes far beyond the classic, but caffeinated, Irish Coffee. Here's a few that will allow you to party and still get your sleep.

—Jack Bettridge

IRISH & GINGER

The happening-est of today's Irish cocktails also happens to be the simplest: Irish & Ginger. Various called an Irish Buck and an Irish Highball, it's sometimes made with club soda, but the mix of spicy ginger, sour citrus and smooth whiskey are what make it captivating.

1½ oz. Jameson's Irish Whiskey
Ginger ale or ginger beer
Lime

Pour whiskey over ice in a highball glass. Top to taste with your choice of ginger ale or ginger beer. Add a squeeze of lime juice and garnish with lime wedge.

THE EMERALD

The Blarney-est of the drinks of Erin is the Emerald. The deception's in the name. Reason will tell you it's really a Manhattan made with Irish whiskey. Your eyes will tell you it's not emerald colored. What's honest is its great taste. Because the bitters are orange, we suggest a whiskey from Northern Ireland.

2 oz. Bushmill's Irish Whiskey
1 oz. (or to taste) sweet vermouth
2 dashes orange bitters
Orange twist

Pour whiskey, vermouth and bitters over ice in a mixing glass. Stir or shake. Strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish with orange twist.

BLACKBERRY MALT

You've heard of the black Irish? The darkest of Irish cocktails is the Blackberry Malt. The blackberry reference is for the fruit that colors it. The malt is for single-malt Irish whiskey, a better choice than a blend to stand up to a mesh of sweet and sour flavors.

2 oz. The Irishman Single Malt Irish Whiskey
1 tsp. simple syrup
Juice of one-half lime
12 fresh blackberries

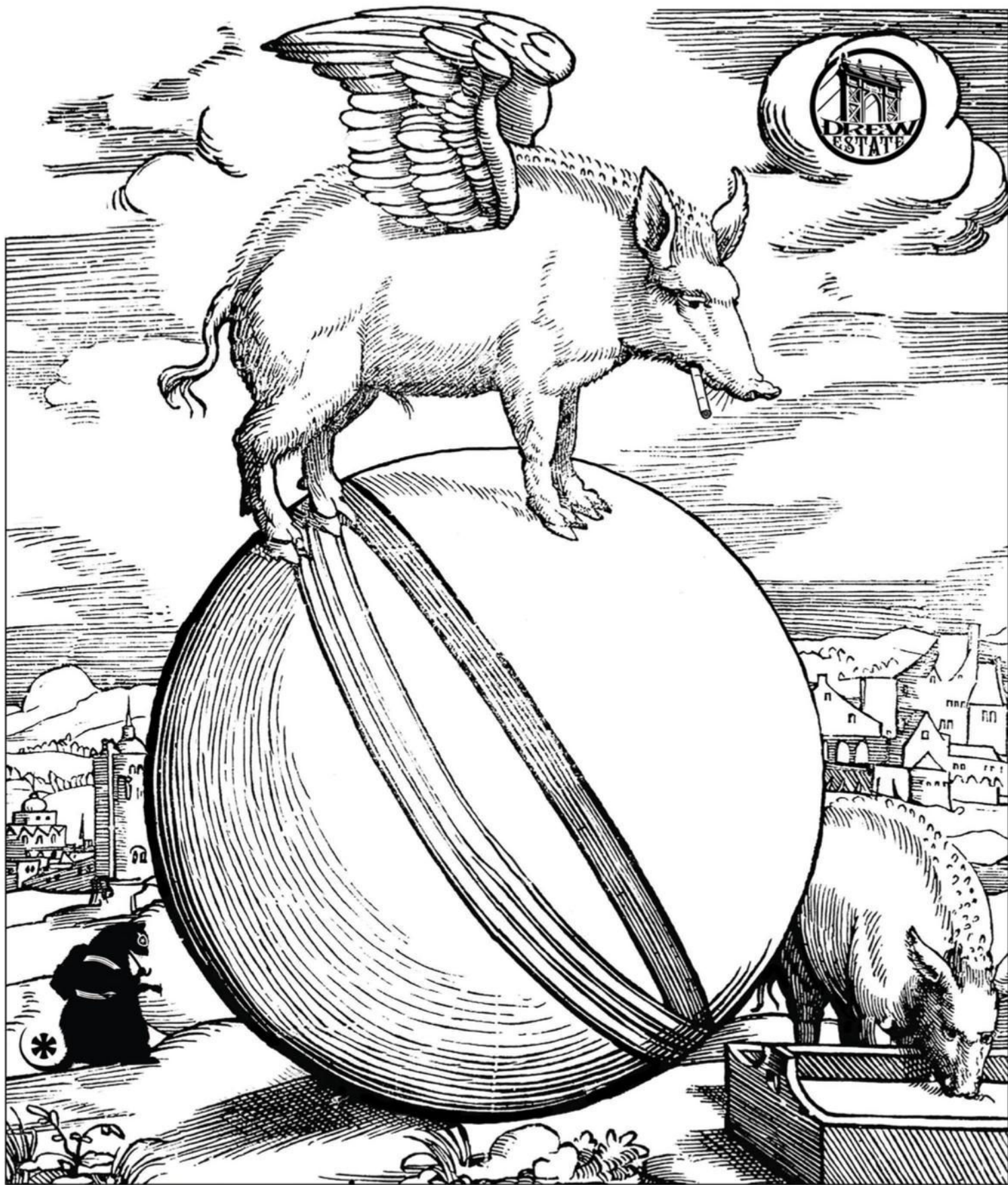
Muddle berries in a mixing glass and add whiskey, syrup and freshly squeezed lime juice. Shave with ice and sieve with a strainer into a cocktail glass. Or serve over fresh ice in a highball glass with soda water.

HARD SHANDY

Tullamore D.E.W.'s "Brew and a D.E.W." campaign pitches the beer-and-a-shot concept. Its Hard Shandy takes it a couple of steps further. Into a standard Shandy (beer and lemonade) it directly pours whiskey. We think it's a tastier way to add spirit to beer than the tastelessly named Irish Car Bomb.

50 ml. Tullamore D.E.W.
10 ml. cloudy lemonade
250 ml. wheat beer

In a pilsner glass, add Tullamore D.E.W. followed by lemonade and finish with beer. Garnish with a lemon wedge.



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Man on the Move

*Steve Harvey seems to be everywhere—
on television, radio, in books and more.
He only slows down for a fine cigar*

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It's

ALMOST 4 P.M. ON A mid-January Wednesday in Chicago—which means Steve Harvey has been up and working for about 12 hours. So far. • “My goal is to be done by 6:30 p.m.—instead of 8,” he says, picking at a plate of nachos on the conference table in front of him. “Then at least I might get to go home for 10 hours.” • Even as he takes his lunch break, he’s working, having discussions with various members of the staff of “Steve Harvey,” his daily talk show, about taping his second show of the day and budget issues with one of his other TV shows that he hosts in Atlanta and Los Angeles.



Tall and husky, with the build of a onetime athlete, Harvey chats easily, even as a makeup person swabs his imposing shaved dome in broad, even strokes with a small, soft sponge. The rush to get extra shows in the can is necessitated by the fact that Harvey’s wife is whisking him away for an uncharacteristic week off to celebrate his impending 60th birthday. The week after that will be devoted to hosting the Miss Universe Pageant in the Philippines. (Yes, they invited him back, despite what Harvey calls one of the hardest moments of his life.) As a result, the normally busy Harvey is downright swamped.

“Everything I do, I have to do something else at the same time,” he says. “If I don’t multitask, it’s impossible to get to everything. I’m an expert at time management. I have a very simple philosophy: I spend all my time building dreams so that when I get time, I can live them.”

It’s already been an eventful week. He made headlines after a meeting with President Donald Trump (then president-elect) who put him on the phone with Dr. Ben Carson to discuss the problems of inner-city housing, a cause Harvey supports. Harvey, who is friends with former-President Barack Obama, appeared on his own radio show a few days afterward to acknowledge the unhappiness that many fans expressed about his meeting with Trump. “The transition teams on both sides asked me to meet, and I’m glad I did,” he says. But he was being true to himself in taking the meeting, in his hopes of being able to make a difference in creating programs and facilities for inner-city kids.

“You have to take a seat at the table when you’re invited,” he says. “Change can only happen when we sit at the table. If you’re not at the table, you can’t refuse the menu, or suggest what you should be eating.” Afterward, he told reporters: “I walked away feeling like I had just talked with a man who genuinely wants to make a difference in this area.”

The same week, his staff had surprised him with an early birthday show with singers Stevie Wonder and former CIGAR AFICIONADO cover subject Usher as the special guests. And on this day he is still shaking his head at a guest from the show he just taped, a fellow named Chad Bernstein, whose organization, Guitars Over Guns, had convinced 500 kids to give up gangs in favor of music. On Bernstein’s previous visit to Harvey’s show, Harvey had arranged a \$5,000 donation for the group. Bernstein had returned to tell Harvey that the donation paid to build a recording studio, which meant dozens more teens had set gangs aside to make music instead.

“He said 50 kids were working there—the price of two of my suits opened a recording studio,” Harvey marvels. “That’s what it cost: the

Harvey meeting with President Donald Trump (who was then president-elect) on January 13.



“The transition teams on both sides asked me to meet, and I’m glad I did. You have to take a seat at the table when you’re invited.”

price of two suits in my wardrobe budget for the show. I don’t buy two suits, I can open a recording studio for these kids.”

Harvey has his share of suits. “What do I have—250, 300 suits?” he asks his assistant. Nearby his wardrobe hangs in order of hue, golds fading into rusts, blues moving to gray and black. “I ain’t cute, so I might as well have something nice for them to look at. I’m comfortable in a suit. I like a tie. When I’ve got one on, I’m comfortable, not uptight. I like to dress to impress.” His long-time pal, Cedric Kyles, better known as Cedric the Entertainer, was mentored sartorially by Harvey. “He was the first dude who told me, ‘Dress like a professional. You’ve got to be somebody people wanna come see,’” says Kyles.

Along with the suits, there are cigars—many of them. He has a collection of humidors scattered between his offices and homes in Chicago and Atlanta, enough to make sure he never gets caught short without a fine cigar within easy reach.

“I’ve got five humidors in my office in Atlanta, including one Daniel Marshall made me,” he says. “In my office here in Chicago, I’ve got five more humidors, all with different things in them: Cubans, OpusX. One just has a collection of Acid cigars, because I like those flavored ones once in a while. Some of my traditionalist friends don’t like that, but what do

they know? I’ve got another one with nothing but Davidoffs. I’ve got a Vigilant inside my wine cellar, with some very rare things—and another big one in my man-cave in my basement. It’s so big that, when you turn the lights on in it, it looks like a store.”

Harvey is sitting atop a career that spans a radio show, a new book and a nearly endless TV schedule that keeps him moving. He triangulates his commute between his home in Atlanta, where he shoots “Family Feud” in the summers; Chicago, where he has shot his talk show for five years, and Los Angeles, where he shoots “Little Big Shots” and “Celebrity Family Feud.” The man doesn’t slow down.

Harvey learned his work ethic growing up poor but churchgoing in Cleveland, where his father, a coal miner, moved Steve and his four older siblings from West Virginia. The first in his family to attend college, Harvey went to Kent State University (where he was classmates with Arsenio Hall) to major in advertising, but wound up flunking out. He spent years doing a variety of jobs, everything from cleaning carpets to selling insurance.

Harvey, who has a memory for significant dates, can pinpoint the moment his life changed.

“It was October 8, 1985. A girl I knew invited me to a comedy club

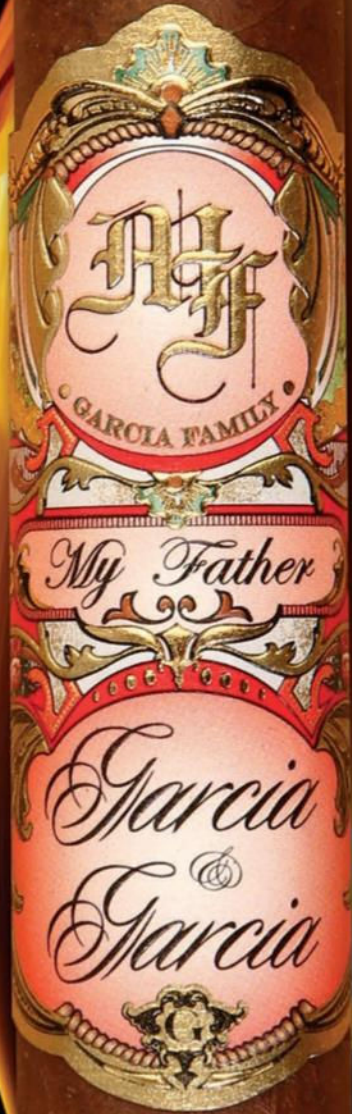
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Harvey took “the worst walk of my life” when he hosted the 2015 Miss Universe contest and mistakenly named Miss Colombia (top) the winner—it was Miss Philippines. He was asked back.

in Cleveland,” Harvey says, his warm eyes twinkling a bit at the memory. “I had been writing jokes for a comedian I knew, who needed help. I was getting \$50 a month and thought that was great. This girl told me, ‘You should stop writing for someone else and do them yourself.’ So we’re at the comedy club and I signed up for the next week’s open mic, because they only had room for 10 that night.

“Nine guys got up there and everyone was laughing. I was mesmerized. I thought, ‘That’s what I want to do.’ Then the 10th guy for the open mic didn’t answer when they called his name and the emcee said, ‘OK, let’s go to next week’s list. Is Steve Harvey still here?’ So I ran up onstage. At the end of the night, I won amateur night.”

He was paid \$50, and he was off and running. “I went to work the next day and quit my job. I told my ex-wife that I’d found what I want to be: I’m gonna go be famous. The only person who believed me for a whole year was my father. He said, ‘If you’re funny, go ahead.’ He believed in me.”

Making that decision came easy. Making the grade proved more challenging. What got him through—from living in his car and bathing surreptitiously at public swimming pools in his tough, early days—was a belief in himself and a taste for hard work that stays with him to this day.

“When I met him around 1988, he was already a big road comic—he was one of the few black headliners working clubs in the midwest,” his fellow comedian Kyles recalls. “His work ethic was amazing. It took him years to become a headliner. So that multitasking? It’s nothing new. When we were doing ‘The Steve Harvey Show’ sitcom, we would shoot the show during the week. Then we’d go out and do shows on the road during the weekend and be back in time for the show’s table read on Monday morning.”

“He has the busiest schedule of anyone I know,” says Alex Duda, executive producer of “Steve Harvey,” a show that has won Harvey a pair of Daytime Emmy awards, in addition to People’s Choice and NAACP Image awards. “He always has so much going on.”

It doesn’t end with work. His meeting with President Trump to help inner-city children speaks to the values embedded in him by his mother at an early age. “My mother said things to me as a kid, like, ‘God blessed you to become a blessing,’ but I didn’t get it at the time,” Harvey says. “When I had successful shows on TV, she would tell me, ‘Don’t forget, God ain’t made you famous just so you can be famous.’ She made me think all the time about who am I helping. She would say: ‘You were less fortunate—now what have you done for somebody less fortunate than you?’ And so I started mentoring kids, going to youth detention centers to talk to the kids there.”

Harvey’s message is almost always the same: No matter the mistakes you may have made, you can build a better future if you have faith. As he says at a number of different points during this day, “If you change your attitude, you change your altitude.” He offers those exact words to his audience after the first taping wraps, going on to express feelings so heartfelt that his voice cracked briefly with emotion.

Which fits with the persona that Steve Harvey has always presented: the commonsense approach, supported by his faith. At the height of his popularity as a stand-up comedian, playing to packed arenas, he would begin each show with the same invocation: “To me, God is everything. Everything I have, everything I am, I owe to God.” Granted, he usually followed that with a sly smile as he added, “Gon’ be some times tonight when it sounds like I don’t know God. But I do.”

Age hasn’t slowed Harvey down. Indeed, Harvey can’t quite believe he’s reached this particular peak. “Man, 60 seemed so far away when I was 30—but then, when I was 30, I was living in my car,” he says. “What I am



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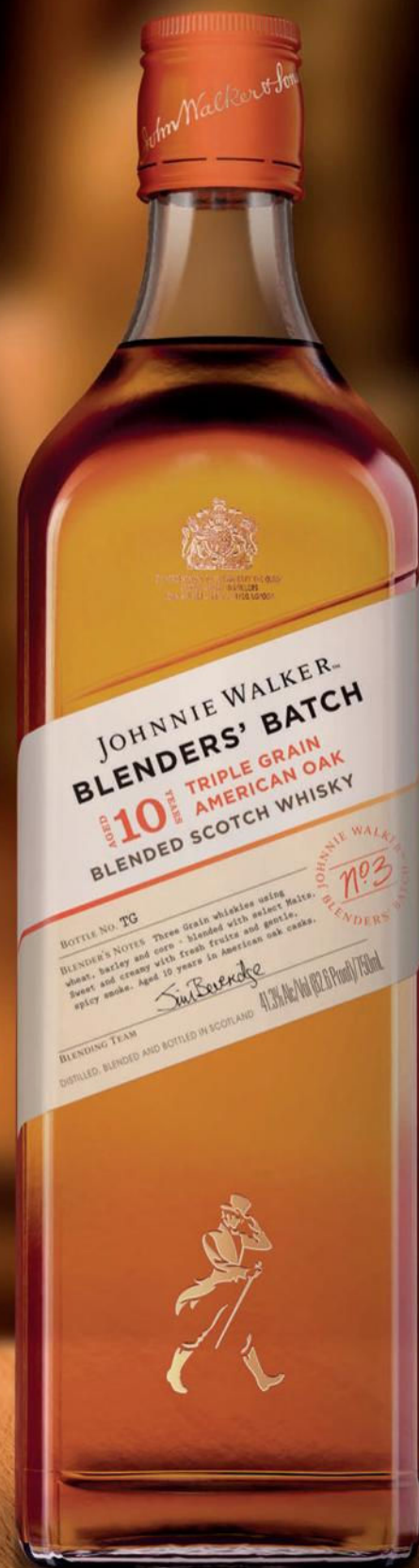
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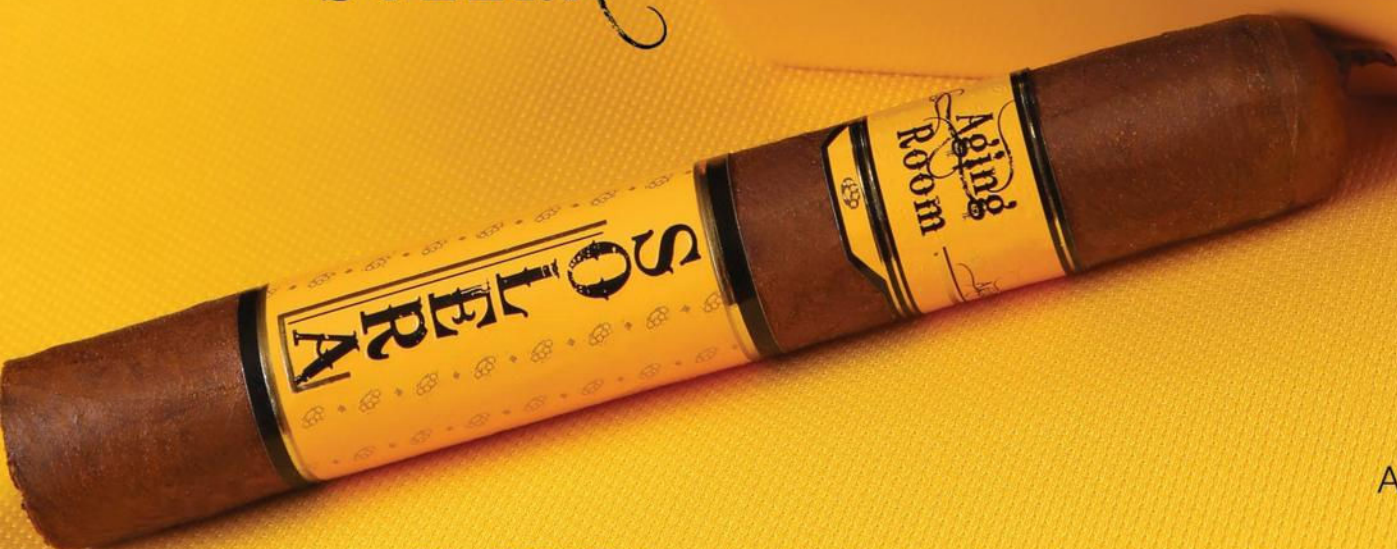


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today almost seemed unthinkable. I didn't even have an image of 60 when I was 30. Back then, I was so consumed with right now, with the next gig, and how am I going to make that \$1,000 I need, and if I could just make this \$175 over here. Do I have to work this hard? Yeah, I do, to get where I want to. I'm trying to get in a position where, when I'm gone, my children's grandchildren know my name. That might sound strange, but that's important to me."

Whether chatting with a guest on his talk show or acting as moderator to gameshow contestants, Harvey brings the same down-to-earth sense of the absurd that marked his stand-up work. He's a slow-burn reactor, wielding his athletic eyebrows and aggressive mustache to draw the maximum laughter as he lets some moment of unexpected hilarity sink in. YouTube is rife with such encounters, including Harvey's reaction to the "Family Feud" competitor who answered the question, "Name something that follows the word 'pork'" by saying, "-cupine." Harvey stares at the camera, incredulous. "What," he says, "is -cupine? This is the greatest answer I've ever heard!"

His stand-up was built on Harvey's similar amazement at both the mysteries and ridiculousness of life. He turned perspicacity into a comic style.

"I found out that common sense was not that common," he says. "I thought, Hmm, I can make a career out of this, because too many people ain't got it. I'm not Dennis Miller. I don't say anything heavy. It's about a unique phrasing, the unique way I say it. I like jokes that go over the plate and just as you swing, it makes a hard left."

His physicality and use of voices, his sense of observation about the community in which he was reared may spark memories of legendary comedian Richard Pryor. It's no accident.

"In college it was Richard Pryor, Richard Pryor, Richard Pryor," Harvey says. "He was the whole reason I got into comedy. But when I was a kid, I loved Jonathan Winters, Red Skelton, Jackie Gleason, Dick Van Dyke."

His stand-up material, drawn from his own life, often centered on the differences that men and women found hardest to bridge. He made it funny, but realized he was thinking more deeply about the subject as his own daughters began to mature. Which led to his first book, *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*, which spawned his talk show.

"The show came from the book, which he wrote for his daughters," Duda says. "He realized after the response to the book that he had millions of daughters. That's what drives the show, which is about relationships and everyday people."

Harvey subsequently has written several more books, the most recent of which, *Jump*, is subtitled, *Take the Leap of Faith to Achieve Your Life of Abundance*. Harvey himself married for the third time in 2007 and uses his own experience as he counsels others. His one indispensable piece of advice to about-to-be-married men?



Harvey is a cigar collector, with humidors located in the many spots where he works and lives. He has 10 humidors (above) in Chicago and Atlanta, to ensure a great smoke is never far away.

"I tell every man who gets married, 'You can be happy—or you can be right.' You make that decision everyday," he says. "If you're in a relationship and your goal is to be right, understand that you're going to be arguing with a person who is an expert at arguing. You have to understand what you're up against: You're arguing with someone who knows everything about you. I learned after two marriages that I'd rather be happy."

"The mistake women make is thinking 'I can change him.' You keep thinking that but, ladies, we are how we are. We are all basically the same. You can't change us. But you can persuade us, get us to do things we don't want to do. For example, my wife likes Broadway shows. And I don't like musicals at all. But, because we sleep together, I sit there and try to find something I like about it. She walks out after and she's in a great mood: 'Let's go back to the hotel and sleep together.' Jackpot."

As with his comedic success, Harvey's considerable love for cigars didn't happen overnight. "The first meaningful cigar I smoked was 20 years



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“I have a very simple philosophy: I spend all my time building dreams so that when I get time, I can live them.”



Harvey was an outstanding stand-up comedian (left, in 2001), but he quit that medium in 2012. Today he hams it up on radio and television, especially when hosting “Family Feud” (above).

ago, the night my son Wynton was born: July 18, 1997,” he says. “It was so cool—I smoked an Ashton Maduro. I’d tried cigars before and it hadn’t really worked for me. I smoke a lot of different cigars, but that was the first one that mattered. It was in my backyard, and I smoked it with my two best friends at the time.”

As befits a busy man, Harvey selects his cigars based upon the time he has to smoke. “These days, I’ve got short ones for when I’ve only got 20 minutes and nice big ones for when I’ve got an hour and can sit with it. My go-to cigar is an OpusX, at the end of the day. But my all-time favorite is a Cohiba Siglo VI.” He has learned to be discerning. “I used to pick my cigars by the way they looked, if they had a pretty wrapper or band,” he says. “Little did I know.”

Harvey prefers mild-to-medium cigars and wants to hold on to something solid when he’s smoking: “All the cigars I like have to have a nice ring gauge. If I’m going to smoke something, it has to look like a cigar from across the street. No thin ones, nothing that looks like a cigarette.”

If Harvey hit his stride as a stand-up comic in the mid-1990s, he moved to the next level with the “Original Kings of Comedy” tour, which ran from 1998–2000. Teaming Harvey with Cedric the Entertainer, D.L. Hughley and the late Bernie Mac, it was the highest-grossing comedy tour of its time, selling out arenas and bringing in \$18 million and \$19 million respectively in the first two years on the road—and that was before it pulled in almost \$40 million more at the box office, from Spike Lee’s 2000 concert film of the tour.

“The ‘Original Kings of Comedy’ tour, professionally and goal-wise, cemented my faith in everything that was happening to me,” Harvey says. “Nobody had sold that many tickets to a comedy show. We sold out the MCI Center (in Washington, D.C.) on back-to-back weekends. That’s 64,000 people in four shows. And that was all without a single newspaper

article about the tour. There was no Facebook, no Twitter or social media. No newspaper printed a single story about the tour until the third year, when they found out we were going to do a movie. It was my greatest accomplishment as a stand-up to that date. We were like rock stars. There’s nothing like that.”

Harvey recognizes the power of the experience that comes in being able to get a room packed with thousands of people to rock with laughter. He also knows that power goes both ways.

“When you’re out there, you’re a doctor,” he says. “You produce a laughter that releases endorphins, a chemical that makes you feel good—and it’s free. It not only gives you a euphoric feeling, but it comes with one of the most basic human emotions, one that produces hours of laughter.

“On the ‘Kings of Comedy’ tour, I could hear the audience when I was in my dressing room, when Bernie was onstage—that feeling of laughter just washing over the stage. You know you’re killing it, but it’s very, very humbling. Those laughs are bigger than you and your talent. And the moment it goes away, you’re not the same.”

Commanding laughter from arena-sized crowds is a powerful stimulant, Harvey admits. He was filling those arenas by himself, at the point he decided to retire from stand-up.

“It was August 2, 2012, so it’s creeping up on five years,” he says. “Fortunately, I get to be funny on every show I do: my radio show, my talk show, the game shows. I’m able to be funny on all of them. But nothing can ever come close to what it feels like when you’re onstage and it’s 12,000 people and it’s you and a spotlight, a bar stool, a glass of water and a microphone. There’s nothing like that. It’s the basis of everything I am.”

Leaving stand-up, the career that made him famous, was a tough call for Harvey. “It was a heartbreaking decision. I cried so hard afterward. I was on my knees. It was crazy to walk away from something that meant so much to me.

But if I hadn't, I would have had no time for my life. Touring takes all your time. In 32 years, I missed my call-time twice. And one of those was when my mom passed. I'm a show-up guy. If I sign a contract, I show up."

He's also a stand-up guy, one who was willing to take his lumps for a very visible mistake, perhaps his greatest public embarrassment: the December 2015 Miss Universe pageant, in which Harvey mistakenly read the name of Miss Colombia as the new Miss Universe, only to return a few minutes later to explain that there had been an error—and that Miss Philippines was, in fact, Miss Universe instead.

"In the Philippines, they love me—but I can't go to Colombia," Harvey says with a rueful smile. "I'll tell you something: That was the worst walk of my life, to go out and say we'd made a mistake. The only walk that was harder was the one to sit in the front row at my mama's funeral. But I went out and I ate it. I didn't roll the teleprompter guy and the cue card guy and the director under the bus. It was on me."

As bad as it was in the moment, the flub grew worse. "It was a disaster, but I didn't know how big a mistake it was until the next day. The next morning, there was this massive crowd, all around my car outside the hotel—all these Colombians giving me hell. My Twitter and Instagram blew up and I got called every name in the book. I got cussed out in Spanish so bad that I know profanity in Spanish now.

"I live on a dead-end street—and it got real when things started coming over the gate. Empty boxes with bows and pictures of bombs. And these death threats on social media that would pop up from fake IP addresses. I wound up with 24-hour armed security at my house. I have two armed guards there full-time to this day. What can you do?"

The mistake finally ran its course, and Harvey was even able to turn it into a positive. "I made fun of it with the T-Mobile Super Bowl commercial," he says, talking about the spot where he apologizes for the "wrong" numbers that start the commercial. "They came to me with the idea of spoofing the Miss Universe thing and I said no. Then they offered me complete creative control and I still said no. Then they told me how much money they were offering—and I did it. It was a pretty good one, too."

The always-moving Harvey will move his "Steve Harvey" show to Los Angeles in the fall, limiting his commuting to cross-country jumps. So why not just move to L.A.?

Harvey gives a "happy wife, happy life" shrug of the shoulders: "I don't move to L.A. because my wife won't let me. Our kids and

grandkids live in Atlanta. Two years ago, my wife and I didn't have any grandchildren; now we have four. So she's got to be able to fly home; that house has to stay there."

Given the career peaks he's summited and his own urge to spend time with those grandchildren, Harvey would hardly be blamed for thinking about easing back.

"When I hear the word retirement, I start laughing," he says. "I can't imagine doing nothing. When I walked away from my act, I knew I've got to do something to stay mentally sharp. I can't do the crossword. That's more stressful than going to work."

Still, he may finally have given himself permission to actually slow down and recharge for the first time in decades.

"We were on vacation in France last summer and I ran into Dr. Phil on the way back," Harvey says. The two TV hosts started chatting about work. "I asked him when he was going back to work and he said, 'September. How about you?' And I told him I was going back to work as soon as I got back. He said, 'You work in the summer?'"

Harvey realized he was an outlier for working year-round, and crafted a plan to take off this upcoming summer season. "It will be the first summer I haven't worked since I was 19. I'm gonna play with my grandkids, sit in the grass and throw a ball."

If he puts performing aside, he has plenty of other ventures to pursue. He and his wife have built the Steve and Marjorie Harvey Foundation, creating mentoring programs for inner-city boys and girls: "My goal is to send 10,000 inner-city kids to college," Harvey says. "So far, we've sent about 70. I need a lot more money. It's just kept growing and growing. Now I understand something I heard an old guy say one time: Your career is what you're paid for. But your calling is what you're made for."

It's getting dark outside, as Harvey readies himself for the briefing for his second TV show of the day, in his

ongoing quest to get home from work at a reasonable hour. But his mind flashes back to the kids from *Guitars Over Guns* and the effect of the recording studio financed by his donation.

"If I kill 20 suits out of the budget, what'll that do?" Harvey hypothesizes. "Let's open 10 more recording studios, save a couple of hundred kids. I got a lot of suits." He pauses, then chuckles: "So I wear one of those black ones over—if I change the shirt and tie, no one's going to notice." ♦

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, NY.





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— THE — **BIG** **BEAR** — OF — **FOX**

**Cigar-loving anchor
Bret Baier of Fox News
hosts one of the most popular
programs on cable TV**

BY MERVYN ROTHSTEIN PORTRAITS BY DAVID YELLEN

It's 5:15 p.m. on a dark and freezing Friday in January, and Bret Baier is standing by his desk in the fifth floor offices of Fox News in Washington, D.C., a 10-minute walk from the United States Capitol. He's typing on his computer keyboard as he watches four TV screens simultaneously, preparing for his hour-long "Special Report," which will air live in just 45 minutes. The screens are busy with what's happening right now on CNN, Fox Business, MSNBC and his own top-rated cable news channel. Just like Fox, Baier is king—an average 2.4 million regularly tune in to his show, the most popular cable news program in its time slot, weekdays from 6 to 7 p.m. It's consistently one of the top five shows in cable news.





Bret Baier, who is watched by millions every night on Fox News, taking a rare moment off at Shelly's Back Room in Washington, D.C.

At age 46, Baier—Fox News Channel’s chief political anchor and a longtime cigar smoker—resembles more than anything a blue-eyed, dark-haired and very gentle bear. He is wearing his onscreen uniform of blue pinstripe suit, white shirt and red patterned tie, and his concentration affirms his reputation for hard work. “I refused to allow myself to be out-worked by anyone,” he once said, explaining his rise to the pinnacle of TV news over his more than eight years in the anchor seat.

He has frequently reported from Iraq and Afghanistan, and has interviewed U.S. Presidents Donald Trump, Barack Obama and George W. Bush, as well as Vice President Dick Cheney, Hillary Clinton and the Dalai Lama. His nightly repeated slogan of “fair, balanced and still unafraid” is a goal many say he has achieved, making his annual salary of more than \$7 million a worthwhile investment for the conservative news channel.



Baier, joined by Chris Wallace and Megyn Kelly, moderated the first debate of Republican presidential hopefuls on August 6, 2015. A record 24 million tuned in to watch.

“Over time, you build trust,” Baier says. “That’s why I think ‘Special Report’ has built this viewership. If you build it, they will come.”

He gets in at 9:30 daily, and at 10 there’s a meeting to plan the program. That plan is fluid. “Most days,” he explains, “especially good news days, the initial meeting changes eight times before the show.” The walls of his office are full of family photos and souvenirs of golf, one of his prime passions. There’s a photo of Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus, two of the best to ever play the game, embracing, and in a glass case, a signed putter and a letter from Palmer. “I won it in an auction,” Baier says, “and two weeks later Palmer died. I got a call from the auction company that the putter was among the last things he signed.”

He’s out of his chair as he’s on his computer, reading through the scripts his staff of writers has presented him on all the news stories of the day. “I switched to a standup desk a year ago,” he says. “I realized that standing makes me more energized throughout the day. That and coffee.

There’s also a treadmill under here, so if I feel ambitious I can walk a lot too. I also write scripts myself. I go through everything with a fine-tooth comb, refining and trimming, adding news content when I get new information. And then I write it as I’m going to say it.”

When the clock hits 5:50 he is in the studio, sitting at the anchor desk with a lit-up Capitol Building aglow in the window behind him. It’s a busy evening, and tonight the show will be seen by 3.5 million viewers—a gunman has killed five and injured eight at the Fort Lauderdale airport in Florida; the U.S. Intelligence community has issued a report declaring that Vladimir Putin attempted to influence the American election; the Dow has almost made it to 20,000 and Congress has officially confirmed Donald Trump as the 45th president. All through the newscast, the Fox control booth, 11 staffers strong, with 24 computer screens at their desks, makes things go smoothly. And, as usual, the words “fair, balanced and still unafraid” end the hour.

When his work is done, Baier is sitting at a table in Shelly’s Back Room, an F Street D.C. retreat for cigar lovers a short walk from the White House. “I smoked a little bit in college, but when I came to Washington I really met people who smoke cigars.

“It’s a luxury for me to sit around and smoke a cigar,” he says. “You can talk to other people. There’s a bunch of guys smoking cigars, and it seems like it’s an ice-breaker, not only with news sources but friends of mine who are cigar smokers.”

He pairs his smokes with a glass of wine, or a glass of 18-year-old single malt Scotch. “There’s nothing like a cold night, a fire, a cigar and a Macallan with one ice cube in it,” he says.

After meeting cigarmaker Rocky Patel, the cigars made by Patel rank among his favorites. “I met him down in Florida and fell in love with a couple of his cigars. The Decade. I like a more elegant kind of cigar, and I smoke the smaller ones or the medium-sized ones. The Sun Grown Maduro. It’s fairly mild but it’s got complexity. There’s chocolate flavor, white pepper flavor.”

Baier was born in Rumson, New Jersey, and grew up in Dunwoody, Georgia, an Atlanta suburb. “I always wanted to be a journalist,” he says. He was the sports editor of his high school paper, and interned at a local TV station for Ernie Johnson Jr., who went on to call NBA games on TNT. When Baier shadowed him for a week, he took note of the news people working around him and changed his focus to news.

After DePauw University in Indiana he took a job at WJWJ-TV in Beaufort, South Carolina, starting with far more modest subjects than presidents, terrorism and world economics. “I covered loggerhead sea turtle nesting and what colors the azaleas would be in the median that year,” he says. He moved from small station to small station, then was hired by Fox in 1997, a year after it was created, as the first reporter in the Atlanta bureau. “When I started, the bureau was in my apartment, with a fax machine and a cell phone. Those were the early days. No one knew who we were. When I called for an interview, they said, ‘Is this the Simpsons network?’”

He covered the Southeast, and Central and South America, for Fox News for four years. “Hurricanes and tropical storms,” he says, “and the

“When you see those images of your child, you want to be the person on the operating table. You want to say, ‘Don’t do that, I’ll do it.’ It’s not something you can control.”

Elián González case,” the story of child custody that stretched between Florida and Cuba. “I went to Cuba six times,” he says, and he puffed Cohibas in Havana.

As with so many Americans, 9/11 changed Baier’s life. “Then 9/11 happened,” he says. “I was called to back up, originally in New York, and I was rerouted to Washington when the plane hit the Pentagon. I started doing live shots for Fox affiliates around the country. A few weeks later they asked me to be the Pentagon guy. Soon after, I was on an overseas trip with then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. I never went back to Atlanta.”

After covering the Pentagon, Baier became White House correspondent for Fox, and on January 5, 2009, took over the 6 p.m. “Special Report” from Brit Hume. “When I was in the Southeast, I covered the Florida recount in Tallahassee of the 2000 Gore-Bush presidential election, and I filed all kinds of stories for Brit. We hit it off, and he wanted to figure out a way to get me up to Washington. Fast forward to 9/11.”

Baier calls Hume his mentor and good friend. “I learned a ton from Brit,” he says, “and I credit him with making me a much better writer and correspondent.”

Baier lives in the Georgetown section of Washington with his wife, Amy, and their two sons, Paul and Daniel. Paul was born in 2007 with several major congenital heart defects, and has had three open-heart surgeries, eight angioplasties and a stomach surgery unrelated to his heart condition. Baier wrote about his son’s health struggles in *Special Heart: A Journey of Faith, Hope, Courage and Love* (written with Jim Mills), which in 2014 became a *New York Times* best-selling book.

But right now Paul is “doing great,” Baier says. “He’s the tallest kid in his class. On the playground, you wouldn’t know about his problems. He’s got more challenges ahead. We probably have an angioplasty sometime next year, and another open-heart surgery, when he’s 13, 14, 15. Hopefully that’s the end, but there may be more after that. But he’s a trouper. His little brother, Daniel, beats him up; he beats up his brother. It’s a normal existence. Which is all we hope for.”

The many operations and battles have left Baier with a positive attitude.

“I feel amazingly blessed. I feel so fortunate. I feel like it gave me a perspective on life that changed me forever. It made me a better anchor, a better reporter, a better father, a better husband, a better person. When you see those images of your child, you want to be the person on the operating table, you want to say, ‘Don’t do that, I’ll do it,’ and it’s not something you can control. I’m big about control, and making deadlines. So it changed us as a family. We appreciate the moments that we have together. It makes vacations and birthdays and Christmas richer and more rewarding.” He and Amy spend time helping the Children’s National Medical Center in Washington, which is responsible for Paul’s success story.

In *Special Heart*, Baier makes clear how much he feels the role of religion in their lives helped him and Amy cope. “It was a big part of how we got through it,” he says. “We’re Roman Catholic, and our faith

is important to us, as is prayer. I don’t have a problem talking about it. I’m a believer. I don’t wear it on my sleeve, but I’m not afraid to say it affects me. And we believe it helped us get through the darkest moments of the surgeries.

“So every night that I can put him to bed I pray with Paul. Every night he prays for the people still in the hospital, so that they can get out like he did.”

Baier’s new book, which came out earlier this year, is about a very different subject—President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The book, *Three Days in January: Dwight Eisenhower’s Final Mission* (written with Catherine Whitney and published by William Morrow), deals with Eisenhower’s career in the military and in the White House, his farewell address in 1961, and the transition to his successor, John F. Kennedy, as well as between Ike and his predecessor, Harry S. Truman.

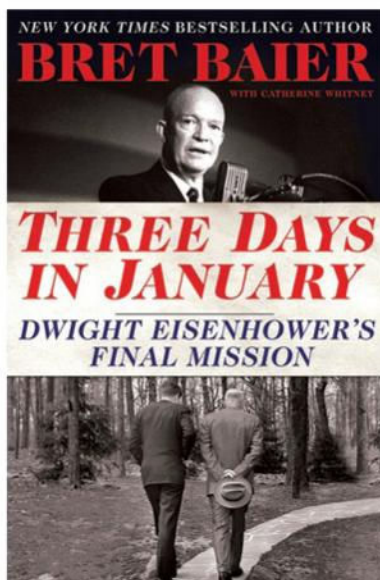
Baier was inspired to write the book after a special golf trip. “I was invited to Augusta National—the Holy Grail of golf invites,” he says. “I’d never played there before. And when I got there they told me I was staying in the Eisenhower cabin. I was thrilled. It’s right there on the 10th tee. I was so excited I couldn’t go to bed. I poured myself a glass of wine, and suddenly I had this sense that I didn’t know as much about President Eisenhower as I should have. I had a sense that history

essentially started for my generation and younger ones with Kennedy.”

He booked a trip to the Eisenhower Presidential Library, in Abilene, Kansas. “He’s underappreciated,” Baier says of the 34th American president. “When people look back at that time, they think of a sleepy time, a happy time. But the truth is it was a really dangerous time, when nuclear war could’ve happened, a number of times. That was always hanging over Ike’s shoulder. Yet he didn’t lose a single U.S. soldier in eight years. He created the National Highway System, with bipartisan support. He had the first civil rights legislation since reconstruction. He had this air about him that was leadership.”

Eisenhower, Baier says, also gave Kennedy a smooth transition, unlike the one Harry S. Truman gave Ike. “From Eisenhower’s perspective, Truman never treated him well. They had a very icy turnover in 1953, to the point where the Eisenhowers stayed in the car on inauguration morning. They didn’t go into the White House for the traditional cup of coffee. When the Trumans got in the car it was a silent ride to the Capitol. Imagine how awkward that would be.”

Baier was attracted to golf at an early age. “I played on my high school team, and we won the state championship my final year. And I played NCAA golf at DePauw. I really love the game. It’s my escape. When I’m walking down the fairway, there’s something about it that really relaxes me. So when anybody is concerned about how much golf a president plays, I never worry about it, because I think it’s a great thing for the mind, for the ability to think. I know the peace that it gives me, so I hope our commander in chief gets that same feeling.”



He carries a four handicap now, but discounts that ranking. "I'm a giving four, a walking wallet with my friends. I was a scratch player, but election schedules make the handicap go up."

When he tees it up, the cigars come out. "Cigars have a common place on the golf course a lot of times. So after a round, we'd end up at some watering hole, and I got an appreciation for them."

Americans' feelings about Fox News are even more complex than a good cigar. Some people swear by Fox and praise its coverage, while others swear at the channel. What does Baier say to those who criticize his employer?

"Most of the most vocal critics of Fox News don't watch Fox News," he says. "Or they don't watch my show. And they have a perception of the conservative leanings of the opinion shows. So I tell them, watch 'Special Report' for three nights and then e-mail me, get back to me. I do that to the most vocal people on Twitter or Facebook, and I will say, give me a shot. And a lot of times, they come back and say, 'O.K., yeah, that was fair.'" Fox News, he says, is "like a newspaper. We have a news section and an opinion section. And some people can't delineate, because it's painted with a broad brush. But on the news side we break a lot of stories, we cover stuff better I think than a lot of the national news programs that don't get as much attention as we do."

"Fox News is a wonderful place to work. I've been here almost 20 years and I'm proud of my time here and I'm proud of our news product and I'm proud of our network."

He does acknowledge that the state of journalism in the Internet age, especially with the proliferation of fake news that may have influenced the election, is troublesome. "I think it's serious for organizations that don't take the time to really go back and look through what they're getting before they put it out there. The words 'reports say' don't cut it anymore, because you get a lot of fake stuff. I spend a lot of time responding to viewers—on e-mail and Facebook and Twitter. They'll say, 'Why are you not looking at this, why are you not doing it?' And I'll respond, 'because it's not true.' We could spend every day running down a million not-true stories because of the proliferation on the Internet."

"So it makes our job tougher. But it also makes it more important, because you can go to someplace that you trust—and feel that what you see on that show you can trust. And I want to be that place. And if we make a mistake, we get out there and correct it. We apologize and make sure that we get it right. That's what my show has always done, and will continue to do. And fortunately we don't make many mistakes."

One highly publicized mistake Baier did make, just a few days before the November 8 presidential election, was saying that an indictment was the "likely" outcome of the FBI investigation of the Clinton Foundation's connection with the State Department when Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State. There was in fact no such likelihood, as Baier readily acknowledges.

"It was a live shot that I agreed to do with my friend and mentor Brit Hume right after my show ended," Baier says. "I went over to his studio, and in the Q & A he asked: Would investigators continue even if she's



Baier, who has been to Cuba six times, puffed Cohibas on the island. He pairs cigars with wine, single-malt Scotch or a round of golf.

elected? And I said our sources said yes. And at the end, instead of saying investigators would continue to make their case, to bring it to a prosecutor, I said yes, and it could go likely to an indictment. Well, that's obviously not the process. That's not what I meant to say. But it's how I ended the live shot. And because it was so close to the election it got picked up, as that was the phrase, 'likely indictment.' And you can't use the 'I' word anywhere near an election. It became an issue, and immediately I addressed it. Got off the air, typed an e-mail to everybody in Fox, said I screwed up, don't use this, this is what I meant. The next day on air I did it twice, and then finally did a formal apology the next day because it was really important to get out there and clarify that our original reporting was what it was. It was unfortunate because we had had such a great run covering the election and I didn't want to screw up that moment. But words matter. I've learned from that and I won't be doing any more live shots right after my show, off-the-cuff."

In the final weekend of the campaign, Trump and his vice presidential running mate, Mike Pence, as well as conservative commentators and websites, focused on the "likely" indictment and ignored the retraction. Does Baier think his mistake affected the election outcome? "No," he says. "We corrected it. It was clearly corrected in the record. And there were many other things that were factors in this election, that affected it. It was unfortunate, but we moved on, and I think we did a pretty great job on election night."

What does he think of President Trump? "I think in his heart, having interviewed him numerous times, that he really wants to make America succeed. But he does it sometimes in a way that really angers people, he does it sometimes in a way that people question what's really going to happen."

"But he is a unique figure in history—he is a billionaire who tapped into blue-collar worries and fears about the future of the country. I think it's so fascinating covering him. He's managed to figure out how the U.S., in a time when there's uncertainty, reacts to things. He won an election, and nobody saw it coming. He surprised everybody. Will he surprise people now and be a better president than his critics say he will be? I think we have yet to see the answer to that."

What we *have* seen the answer to, though, is the quality of Baier. "Sometimes the show isn't sexy. Sometimes it's like eating chicken and broccoli. But we are going to give you the news. And then we're going to analyze the news, and what it means to you. And that equation has worked, from Brit Hume to me. I think we do it every day, and I hope to continue doing that."

"I have an amazing staff, a stable of correspondents. Just amazing. I stand on their shoulders. I'm really happy at 'Special Report,' I'm really happy at Fox News, I think the future is bright for our network, and it's going to be an exciting time."

It's a daily mission for Bret Baier—fair, balanced and still unafraid. In fact, a decade from now, he says, he is still hoping to be in the anchor chair. And when it's time to relax, he'll be doing it on the golf course with a fine cigar. ♦

Mervyn Rothstein is a frequent contributor to CIGAR AFICIONADO.

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The Negotiator

The inside story of **James Donovan**, who sat face-to-face with Fidel Castro, negotiated the release of hundreds of prisoners and opened the door to diplomacy between the U.S. and Cuba

BY PETER KORNBLUH



Fidel Castro and a New York insurance lawyer named James Donovan stood together on the tarmac of San Antonio de los Baños Airfield in Cuba and watched as hundreds of just-released prisoners of war boarded a caravan of planes bound for Miami. It was December 23, 1962. Only the night before, Castro had given Donovan an ornate humidor filled to the brim with 200 cigars—a gift to celebrate the successful culmination of a long, contentious set of negotiations to gain the freedom of the CIA-led exile invasion force defeated and captured at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961.

Donovan was the most famous international negotiator in the United States, if not the world. In early 1962, he had arranged a prisoner exchange with the Kremlin—the release of Francis Gary Powers, a CIA U-2 pilot shot down over Russia while on a reconnaissance mission, for veteran KGB spy Col. Rudolf Abel, captured by the FBI in New York. With all the drama of a Hollywood thriller, the Cold War spy swap took place in the middle of the Glienicke Bridge connecting West Berlin to Potsdam. Donovan's secret negotiations with the Russians were

immortalized in Steven Spielberg's Oscar-nominated movie, *Bridge of Spies*, starring Tom Hanks as Donovan.

Donovan's dramatic negotiations with Castro are equally worthy of a major Hollywood film. They marked the first serious dialogue between Washington and Havana, and led to the first serious discussions of improving U.S.-Cuban relations. In many respects,

James Donovan (right) freed many prisoners held in Cuba's prisons. At left, a Donovan family photo of the negotiator with Fidel Castro. Upper left, Donovan with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.





President John F. Kennedy in 1961 after the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion.

James Donovan's face-to-face talks with Fidel Castro set the historical stage for former president Barack Obama's rapprochement with Cuba more than 50 years later. As the United States and Cuba enter the post-Obama/post-Fidel Castro era, the story of Donovan's historic negotiations with the Cuban *commandante* provides a historical parable for successful diplomacy—one that carries important implications for the future of relations between Washington and Havana.

PROJECT MERCY

The CIA-sponsored paramilitary invasion at the Bay of Pigs remains the most flagrant symbol of U.S. intervention in the long and dark history of conflict between Washington and Havana. From that disastrous act of aggression, however, evolved the first significant opportunity for serious negotiations between the two countries—and the first sincere effort to improve relations.

John F. Kennedy inherited the CIA's plan to invade Cuba from the Eisenhower administration. To maintain a veneer of deniability of a U.S. role, the president pushed the CIA to change the landing site from the populated city of Trinidad to a remote location where the invaders could establish a beachhead before being discovered by Castro's forces. But Cuban militiamen on guard at the Bay of Pigs in the middle of the night spotted the beacon lit by a CIA operative to guide the exile brigade from the dark waters to the beach on April 17, 1961; the element of surprise was lost. Within 72 hours, Castro's forces defeated the CIA's exile brigade. "They trusted me. And they are in prison now because I fucked up," Kennedy told his White House aide, Richard Goodwin. "I have to get them out."

Castro promptly offered Kennedy a way to barter the release of the brigade: 500 Caterpillar tractors and spare parts as "indemnification" for the death and destruction caused by the invasion. To avoid direct negotiations, the president secretly established the "Tractors for Freedom Committee," recruiting four American luminaries (including former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt) to lead it. But their

negotiating strategy with Fidel—a take-it-or-leave-it approach of dictating terms and deadlines—failed, and the Committee disbanded only six weeks after it was created. Over the next year, Castro put the captured soldiers on trial, and announced that fines for their crimes amounted to \$62 million—the price of their freedom. In June 1962, Attorney General Robert Kennedy secretly recruited Donovan to re-open talks with the Cuban leader.

Publicly, Donovan represented the Families Committee of the Bay of Pigs Prisoners. Privately, he would be negotiating on behalf of the White House, with active CIA support. "Every attempt to extricate ourselves from this whole Bay of Pigs episode has failed," the attorney general told Donovan at their first meeting on July 3, 1962. CIA director John McCone instructed Donovan to "immediately proceed to attempt to open negotiations with the Castro government, with the twin objectives of 1) lowering the minimum amount demanded by Castro and 2) arranging that a substantial part of this sum would be payable in food and medicine."

McCone authorized the creation of a secret CIA task force, code-named "Moses," to support Donovan's efforts. Agency officials set up a safe house in Miami for Donovan with a secure phone to use on his way to and from Havana. They gave him special communication devices and a code sheet to use when calling his CIA handlers from Cuba. Fidel would be referred to as "Erie," according to CIA codes; Che Guevara's designation was "Fulton." The code word "Hamilton" meant that negotiations were "difficult, progressing" but had "some hope for a settlement." The CIA's code-name for Donovan's special rescue mission was "Project Mercy."

Donovan quickly received an invitation to travel to Havana. On August 31, 1962, he sat down with Castro for the first time. "Met at Presidential palace with C," reads Donovan's personal chronology of the talks. "Offer[ed] drugs and baby food for men. But no cash or tractors. 4 hrs."

During this first negotiating session, Castro treated Donovan to two lengthy diatribes about the historical atrocities committed against Cuba by the United States. But Donovan maintained a gracious and solicitous tone. He referred to Fidel as "Dr. Castro"—Castro returned the favor by calling him "Dr. Donovan"—and generally accepted his demand for U.S.



Fidel Castro, a cigar clamped in his jaws, talks to reporters on June 14, 1961 after increasing his demands for 1,173 prisoners captured by his forces in the Bay of Pigs invasion.

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“indemnification” for the human and material damages caused by the invasion. How much and in what form that “indemnity” would take was the focus of their negotiations. Donovan explained congressional restrictions on cash payments to Cuba, and stressed, according to his notes, that it would be better for Cuba’s image not to “sell humans.” Castro could gain the sympathy of U.S. citizens by releasing the prisoners. “Two peoples can work together to solve a problem, you know,” he told Fidel.

By the end of this first session, Castro and Donovan had arrived at a general framework of an accord. Cuba would accept a cash payment of \$2.9 million for 60 prisoners who Fidel had already allowed to return to the U.S. for health reasons. The rest of the indemnity would be paid with food-stuffs, medicines and related pharmaceutical supplies whose retail value, rather than wholesale value, approximated \$60 million. Castro commended Donovan on his attitude and approach, in contrast to the Tractors for Freedom Committee. “Things would have been very different then,” Castro said, “if we would have been treated in another manner.”

Donovan returned to Cuba on October 3 to meet Castro at the Dupont mansion on Varadero Beach. This second round of negotiations did not go as smoothly. Castro challenged the calculations for the retail values of the goods; more importantly, the Cuban leader refused to agree to Donovan’s request that all prisoners be released after the first shipment. Over Donovan’s objections, Fidel wanted to release them in stages as each shipment arrived. In a message to Castro drafted before he returned to Florida, Donovan dangled better relations as the ultimate reward for quickly releasing the prisoners: “the happy termination of this negotiation in good faith could create a bridge between the United States and Cuba,” he wrote, “favorable for each in the current international situation.”

These issues remained unresolved when Donovan returned to Havana a week later. By then, details of the proposed accord had leaked to the *New York Herald Tribune*, bringing unwanted publicity to the effort to finalize the deal. When Fidel re-opened discussions on the pricing and types of materials and medicines Cuba wanted, Donovan forcefully reminded him that his proposal was Cuba’s only option to dispose of the Bay of Pigs prisoners. “You can’t shoot them,” Donovan noted. “If you want to get rid of them, if you want to sell them, you have got to sell them to me,” Donovan declared. “There’s only one market for your prisoners of war and I’m it!” On October 11, he returned to Miami empty-handed, still hoping that the talks would be finalized within a few days.

Only four days later, a CIA analyst reviewing reconnaissance photos of the Cuban countryside identified Soviet intermediate range missile sites under construction. As the dangerous superpower showdown known as the Cuban Missile Crisis unfolded, CIA director John McCone convinced President Kennedy to suspend the Donovan-Castro talks. “If definitive news of the secret talks came out,” McCone argued, “public reaction could be severe and make resolving the missile crisis harder.” Even after the missile crisis ended, McCone lobbied the White House against giving Donovan the green light to restart the prisoner negotiations. If the secret White House-CIA role leaked, he told Robert Kennedy, the American public “and many others” would be “confused and disenchanted” to learn that the U.S. was conducting



Donovan in Cuba (above) during his talks with the Cuban government for the release of the prisoners. His one-on-one negotiations with Castro (top photo) ultimately led to the release of more than 1,000 people. Castro also sent Donovan home with a humidor filled with Cuban cigars.

back-channel talks with the Cuban revolutionary who had just placed the fate of the entire world in jeopardy.

On November 20, however, Donovan informed the attorney general that Castro was ready to make a deal. Castro’s interest, and increased public pressure from the relatives of the prisoners, prompted Robert Kennedy to assign one of his top aides at the Justice Department, John Nolan, to assist Donovan in bringing the brigade members home by Christmas. Within only a few weeks, they finalized an arrangement with a number of major pharmaceutical companies, among them Pfizer and Ely Lilly, and food companies to contribute shiploads of supplies from their older inventories in return for tax breaks. President Kennedy was so anxious to see the negotiations completed that he floated the idea of his brother taking a secret trip to Havana to finalize the accord. “The President wants the Attorney General to go down [to Cuba] because he now has



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“You can’t shoot them. If you want to sell them, you have to sell them to me. There’s only one market for your prisoners of war, and I’m it!”

—JAMES DONOVAN

commitments to cover the Castro list,” CIA Director McCone reported to State Department officials on December 14, 1962.

Fidel gave Donovan and Nolan the red-carpet treatment when they returned on December 18. As the final negotiations began, according to a detailed book, *After the Bay of Pigs*, Donovan set the stage with some humor. “The main problem now is that I have decided to ask Santa Claus to join our working team in the United States,” Donovan told Castro. “But we must recall that he goes out of business after December 25th. We should therefore take advantage of the holiday spirit in the United States and attempt to conclude negotiations now. Time is of the essence because of political opposition within the United States and within the Cuban community in the States.”

Substantive obstacles remained. Castro was so distrustful about the quality and contents of the initial shipment that Donovan arranged for a clandestine nighttime trip to Miami for three of his aides to inspect the medicines being loaded onto the cargo ship, the *S.S. African Pilot*. Castro also refused to accept additional drugs in lieu of the \$2.9 million promised him by the Families Committee for the earlier release of 60 prisoners who needed medical attention; he threatened to keep the leaders of the exile brigade in jail unless the money was delivered. Robert Kennedy was forced to raise the funds from private donors at the last minute to secure their freedom.

On December 21, Donovan and Castro representatives finally signed a “Memorandum of agreement between the Government of Cuba and the Cuban Families Committee for the Liberation of the Prisoners of War.” The accord allowed 1,113 Bay of Pigs prisoners, and eventually thousands

more of their relatives, to leave in return for multiple shipments of goods valued at \$53 million that began arriving on December 23. To celebrate, Castro presented Donovan with the cigars and Donovan shared a prayer of St. Francis. “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,” the prayer read in part. “Grant that I may so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand.”

As they watched the former prisoners depart two days before Christmas, Donovan spoke to Castro. “I want you to know that I appreciate your cooperation in many things throughout our negotiations,” he said. “You have been very correct in your dealings with me.” Castro returned the compliment. Donovan, he said, had been a skilled negotiator from whom Castro had learned many things. Castro invited Donovan to bring his family back to Cuba for a vacation at a state-provided villa on Varadero Beach, so they could “discuss the entire future of Cuba and Latin America and their relations with the United States.”

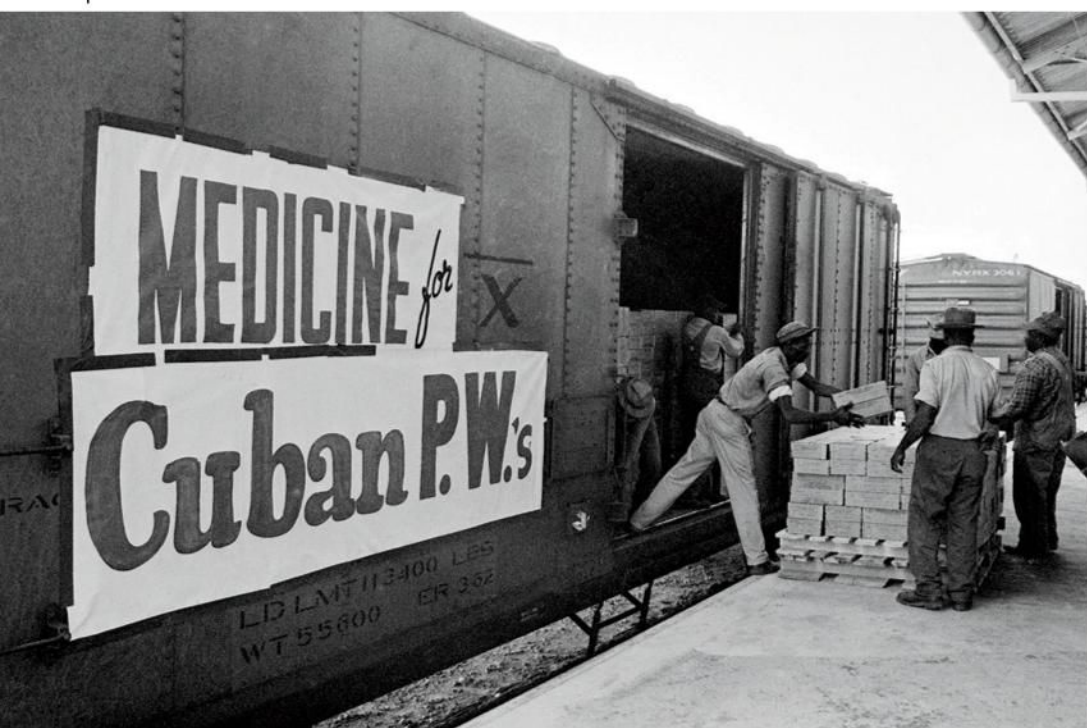
CIA DIRTY TRICKS

Among the materials the United States began shipping to Cuba to complete the accord were hygienic supplies. A U.S. official, Col. Edward Lansdale, who was in charge of the sinister set of covert actions known as Operation Mongoose, saw an opportunity for creative psychological warfare against Cuba. In a proposal to the office of the CIA director, Lansdale suggested that the CIA print Fidel’s image on the inside sheets of the rolls of toilet paper included in the shipments. The “earthy appeal of this is in tune with the Cuban sense of humor,” Lansdale advised in a secret memo, “and they’d really get to laughing at Fidel.” But his proposal to mount a “black propaganda” operation against Castro by doctoring the toilet paper was denied.

The toilet paper caper would not be the last time officials in charge of the dirty war against Cuba tried, and failed, to appropriate Donovan’s work for aggressive purposes. In early 1963, a group of CIA officials devised a plot to turn his unique access to Castro into an opportunity to assassinate the Cuban leader. Their plan, a CIA internal history later reported, called for Donovan to become “the unwitting purveyor” of a poisoned scuba diving suit as a gift for Castro.

This scheme, according to a top-secret CIA report on plots to assassinate Fidel Castro, “progressed to the point of actually buying a diving suit and readying it for delivery.” That meant “dusting the inside of the suit with a fungus that would produce a disabling and chronic skin disease (Madura foot) and contaminating the breathing apparatus with tubercle bacilli”—the bacterium that causes tuberculosis—said Sidney Gottlieb, then the head of the CIA’s famous Technical Services Division (TSD).

But the operation was shelved after Donovan’s CIA handler, Milan Miskovsky, learned of the plot and made sure the contaminated suit never left TSD’s laboratory.



December 20, 1962. Longshoremen in Florida unload food and medicine bound for Cuba, part of the \$53 million worth of U.S. goods sent for the release of the prisoners of war.



On Christmas Eve, 1962, Donovan and Castro watched as the former prisoners climbed into planes in Cuba that would take them to the United States and freedom. A former prisoner hoists his daughter on his shoulders (right) upon his homecoming in Homestead, Florida.



Donovan obtained his own scuba diving suit for Castro—purchased at Abercrombie & Fitch—as a confidence-building gesture for new negotiations with Castro. But he and Miskovsky took steps to secure the gift from any tampering by the so-called “executive action” team at the CIA. “I was in the business of negotiation,” Donovan would later exclaim, “not assassination!”

FIRST TALKS TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS

Incredibly, the assassination plotters sought to sabotage Donovan’s negotiations as he worked to obtain the freedom of three of their CIA colleagues. The three operatives had been caught in September 1960 placing eavesdropping devices in a Havana building that housed the Chinese News Service. To obtain their release without acknowledging their covert operations, CIA director John McCone asked Donovan to request “a Christmas present” from Castro—the release of all U.S. citizens in his jails along with the hundreds of Bay of Pigs exiles who were boarding planes on December 23, 1962. “Jesus Christ,” Donovan exclaimed at the time. “I did the loaves and fishes, and now they want me to walk on water, too.”

Castro pledged that if the delivery of the food and medicines continued smoothly, he would review the cases of U.S. citizens “in the near future.” When Donovan returned a month later Fidel readily agreed to his proposal for a prisoner swap: four Cubans who had been arrested in the United States on various charges—one of them had accidentally shot a nine-year-old girl in New York City during a brawl over Castro’s visit to the United Nations in

September 1960—for all the Americans in Castro’s jails. He invited Donovan to return in March to finalize the exchange as well as to “talk at length” about the future of Cuba and international relations. When Donovan returned to the United States he reported to the CIA and the State Department that Castro’s aide de camp, René Vallejo, had “broached the subject of reestablishing diplomatic relations with the U.S.”

PORCUPINES

In Donovan, Fidel Castro had found the first U.S. interlocutor who he trusted enough to open the discussion about a *modus vivendi* with the United States. Given the rapport Donovan had established with the fiery Cuban leader, the Kennedy administration realized that Donovan could use his diplomatic skills to negotiate better relations with Cuba. Since President Kennedy believed that Castro’s desire for talks “looked interesting,” in the spring of 1963, U.S. officials undertook the first internal debate over whether, and how, to use Donovan to lead the U.S. and Cuba to normalized relations.

“There seems to be some possibility that Castro might be weaned away from the Communists if his idealism, his nationalism and his vanity are catered to,” CIA officials wrote in a secret set of proposed negotiating instructions. “This is where Donovan comes in.” The CIA wanted Donovan to set preconditions on Castro, among them to throw the Communists out, “lock, stock, and barrel.” If Castro did not agree to all U.S. demands, Donovan should “paint for Castro...the permanently black picture that

will prevail—with only one ultimate result—if Cuba continues to make the United States her enemy.” Over at the State Department, officials concurred. Donovan should “take a weeklong walk on the beach” with Castro, stated one secret memo, and tell him “only two things are nonnegotiable, 1) Cuba’s ties with the Sino-Soviet Bloc and 2) Cuba’s interference with the hemisphere.”

President Kennedy, however, took a far more tactful position. “We don’t want to present Castro with a condition that he obviously cannot fulfill. We should start thinking along more flexible lines,” he instructed his national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy. In a top secret/eyes only memorandum of conversation dated March 4, 1963, Bundy reported that “the President, himself, is very interested in this one.”

Donovan returned to Cuba on March 14. He “was given the red-carpet treatment and had several long, cordial talks with Castro,” according to a secret report prepared for President Kennedy. When Castro raised the issue of future ties to Washington, Donovan told him “better relations would probably result if Castro would just tend to his own knitting.” As a gesture of goodwill, Castro released two American women, imprisoned as counter-revolutionaries, to accompany Donovan back to Miami.

On April 5, Donovan flew back to Havana to seal the deal. He brought three diplomatic stage-setters: a new Polaroid camera as a gift for Castro; the page proofs of a forthcoming article in *The Nation* magazine that highlighted the potential for the prisoner exchange to open the door

“Do you know how porcupines make love?” Donovan asked Castro. The Cuban leader said no. “The answer is, very carefully.”

to more normal relations, titled “How MetaDiplomacy Works: James Donovan and Fidel Castro;” and Donovan’s teenage son, John.

Bringing his son along was “the ultimate in gamesmanship,” according to Phillip Bigger’s biography, *Negotiator*. “I hoped that the presence of my 18-year-old would inspire confidence and make a favorable impression on Castro,” Donovan remembered. Indeed, Castro took Donovan and his son on a day-long fishing expedition to the Bay of Pigs, gave them a tour of a new crocodile farm, and took them to a baseball game. “A powerful key in my father’s negotiating style was his tendency to bring it from the bureaucratic level to the human level,” John Donovan recalled years later. In a subsequent interview with *The New York Times*, his father noted that “it was largely because I had brought the boy along that I was able that weekend to persuade Castro to release 35 American prisoners.”

The prospect for better U.S.-Cuban relations was the real reason Castro was persuaded to release the prisoners. The article in *The Nation*, along with major coverage in *Look*, *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, Donovan told him, reflected a shift in American attitudes toward the Cuban revolution in the aftermath of the missile crisis. The average citizen, Donovan said, didn’t want Cuba to become a Soviet satellite, but “so too I didn’t think that the people in the U.S. were intent on his being a satellite of the U.S.; that the integrity of the revolution would be respected as long

as his every effort was dedicated to the betterment of the Cuban people.” Once the prisoner exchange was completed, Donovan argued, Washington and Havana could turn to bigger and more important issues. Castro conceded that holding the Americans as “a bargaining asset” was not in Cuba’s interest because “perhaps it’s preventing something more constructive from being accomplished.” Castro promised that “I’ll release all of them to you” on April 22.

Their talks evolved into the very first serious conversation between Castro and a U.S. representative about how to normalize relations. Fidel posed the question: “If relations were to commence between the U.S. and Cuba how would it come about and what would be involved?” In his debriefing with the CIA, Donovan recounted his colorful response to Castro: “Are you familiar with porcupines? So I said, ‘Now do you know how porcupines make love?’ And he said, ‘No.’ And I said, ‘Well, the answer is very carefully, and that’s how you and the U.S. would have to get into this, but on the specifics this would have to be left to common sense diplomatic discussions.’”

COMMON SENSE DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS

More than half a century later, Donovan’s prediction finally became a reality. Drawing on the legacy of Donovan’s ‘common sense’ approach to negotiating with Cuba, the Obama administration quietly, and “very carefully” held back-channel talks with representatives of Raúl Castro, arriving at an “accommodation of views” to, once again, swap prisoners—three Cuban spies imprisoned in the U.S. since 1998 for a CIA mole and a USAID contractor imprisoned in Cuba—and then move toward normalized bilateral relations. Both presidents simultaneously announced the historic rapprochement on December 17, 2014.

Before Obama left the White House, Washington and Havana were able to fully restore diplomatic relations, reopen embassies, initiate direct mail services and direct commercial air routes, as well as significantly expand economic, cultural and political interaction. In his very last days as president, Obama took steps to normalize migration between the two nations, and sent his top negotiator, deputy national security advisor Benjamin Rhodes, to Havana to sign a new bilateral agreement on counterterrorism, counternarcotics and money laundering prevention programs, among other collaborative law-enforcement operations.

The Donovan-Castro talks not only set a historic foundation for the normalization of relations, they also provided historical lessons for successful dialogue and negotiations with Cuba. Unlike the Tractors for Freedom Committee, which imperiously sought to bully Castro into an agreement, Donovan approached the Cuban leader with respect and civility, along with a persistence, candor and true commitment to discourse. “This is work requiring great patience,” he told *The Nation*. The profile in the magazine described Donovan as the “most successful American practitioner of metadiplomacy—higher diplomacy”—with Cuba.

“He used the art of negotiation as his weapon of choice,” Donovan’s daughter, Mary Ellen Fuller, recounted in *Time* magazine when *Bridge of Spies* premiered in 2015. “He felt that a person simply wants to be respectfully heard, and that it is only when you listen well that you can reach the most just results. History taught him that,” she concluded, “and we could stand to use this weapon today.” ❖

Peter Kornbluh writes frequently for CIGAR AFICIONADO on Cuba.

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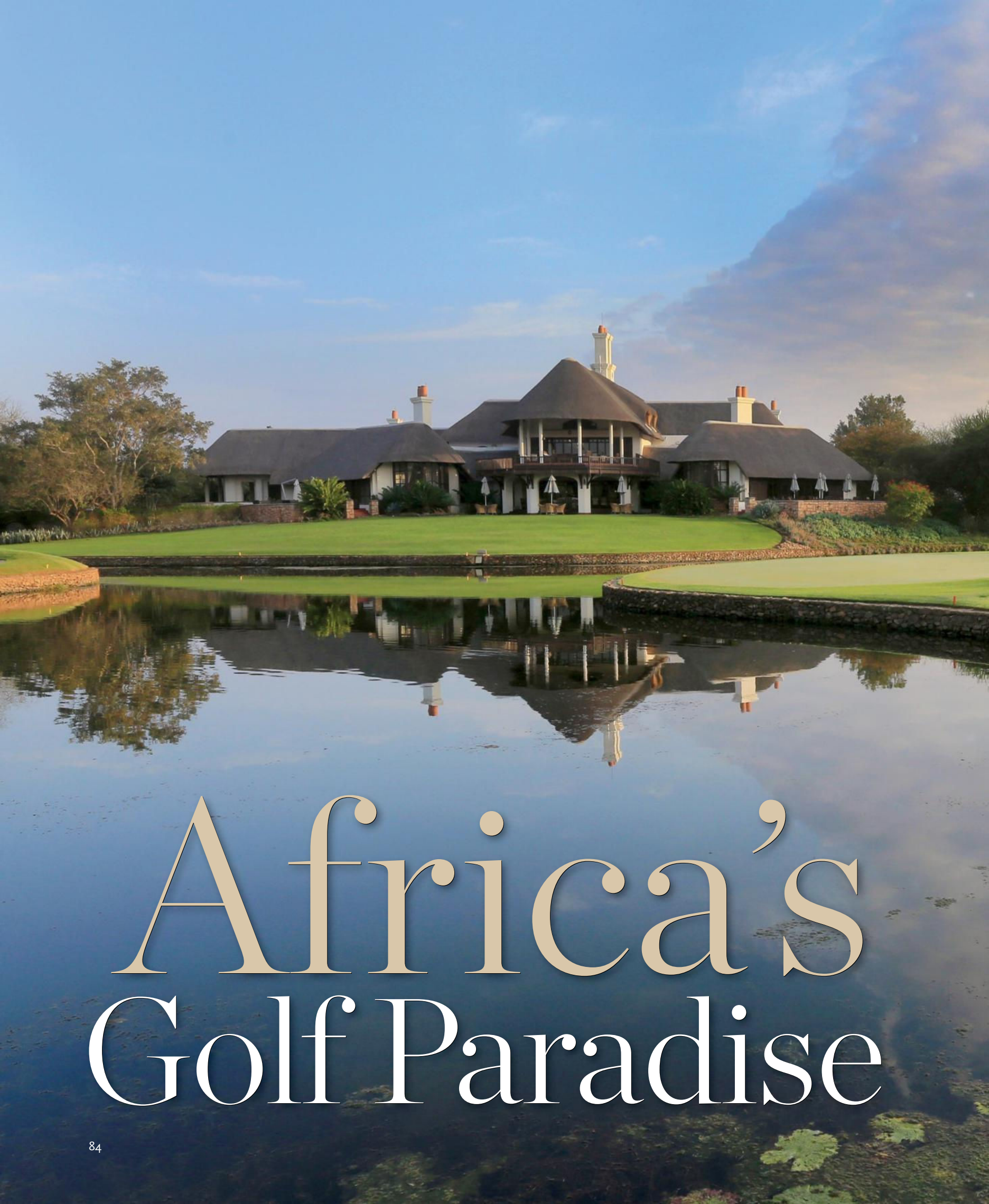
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Leopard Creek, Gary Player's finest design, is the most luxurious golf course in South Africa, a country with an abundance of stunning golf.



South Africa has become one of the world's premier golf destinations, with more than 500 courses, top-tier resorts and a unique backdrop of stunning wildlife BY LARRY OLMSTED



LEGEND GOLF



At Legend Golf & Safari Resort, each hole has been designed by a top golfer. The 19th hole requires a helicopter ride to the 1,300-foot-high tee box, where you take aim at the world's longest par-3 (above right) and its Africa-shaped green. The \$1 million jackpot for a hole-in-one remains unclaimed.

As the helicopter climbs sharply, you see Africa spread out below you, literally and figuratively. Giraffe are tall enough to stand out, even from this height, and the landscape is a tapestry consisting of thick stands of forest, open grasslands, and the manicured fairways and greens of Legend Golf & Safari Resort. But most of all, you see the world's most unusual par-3, its huge green shaped as a perfect outline of the African Continent.

Today, the pin placement is benign, right around the centrally located spot where you'd find Victoria Falls, one of the modern Seven Wonders of the World. "That's one of the easier placements," remarks Pete Richardson, Legend's director of golf, his voice crackling through our headphones. "You don't want to play it when the hole is near the Ivory Coast." Before boarding the helicopter, we got the usual safety briefing with one odd twist—the pilot double checked to make sure all of us had our clubs.

We are on our way to play the world's highest and longest par-3, and the only one that requires a flight to reach the tee box. Dubbed "Extreme 19," it has a single tee perched on the edge of a cliff near the summit of

Hanglip Mountain, 1,300 feet above the Africa-shaped green below. The 10-minute drive from the golf clubhouse to the jungle helipad is a mini-safari of its own, with views of zebras, sable and even the occasional leopard. The package to play the 19th is an add-on to the regular green fees, but just about every visitor does it because, like most things in South Africa, it is spectacular. (It's also a bargain, less than \$150 a head, including flight, pro and forecaddie). We bring only drivers, as this par-3 stretches 400 yards. Thanks to the elevation—a drop about equal to the height of the Empire State Building—you need only drive it about 235 to put it in play, and 260 to hit the green. Anyone who can manage to make par on their first ball (you get six tries) gets the experience for free and has their name added to an honor roll begun by three-time major winner Pádraig Harrington, the first to make a three. The \$1 million jackpot for first hole-in-one remains unclaimed.

If you decide to go on an African safari, you have lots of tough decisions to make, because opportunities are vast and varied. However, if you decide to go on an African golf trip, there is only one reasonable choice—South Africa.

The wildlife is certainly the country's calling card, but even if you never set foot in a Land Rover for a game drive, the golf alone is worthwhile and world-class. After the United States, the British Isles, Australia and Japan, it vies with France as the world's next premier golf destination, home to more than 500 courses—more than Ireland, Spain or even China. Many of them are standout spots, and there is a litany of top-tier luxury resorts, hotels and game lodges unrivalled anywhere in the world. Four courses here make either *Golf* or *Golf Digest's* World Top 100. South Africa also has amazing wine country, beautiful beaches, luxury trains, incredible food, unique culture and one of the world's greatest tourism cities, Cape Town. With inexpensive internal flights, and the rand, its currency, at near-historic lows compared to the U.S. dollar, it is also one huge bargain, whatever your budget or style.

"Playing in South Africa is an extra special experience," says golf-centric luxury travel agent Chad Clark, of Chad Clark Travel Ventures in Phoenix. "Not only are you able to play top-rated courses, but combine the African sun, the wildlife and the coastal views, and you'll quickly see why it is one of the world's greatest golf destinations."

"You don't need to fly 17 hours to play golf," says Lloyd Martindale, general manager of golf operations at Fancourt, South Africa's top resort. "But there is no other place you can play great golf with the kind of wildlife we have."

Some courses in South Africa are wilder than others, and you certainly will not see giraffe, zebra and hippo everyplace you tee it up, but wildlife is pervasive. The chances are good that you will glimpse monkeys, birds and antelope such as impala pretty much wherever you go.

With a lot of coastline, and every imaginable inland terrain, from vineyards to mountains to desert, South Africa accordingly has every kind

of golf. But a few things are common to every course in the country, things that are unique among the world's top golf nations. First, no course is so private that it is more than minor hassle to get on. Second, even the very best golf, along with similar quality food, drink and lodging, is relatively inexpensive, with greens fees averaging \$120 (or less) at top-tier courses. Third, everyone you encounter on and off the courses is almost unfailingly friendly, and there's a huge sense of welcome wherever you go. Fourth, and most odd, is the local insistence on a full meal between nines, a lunch known as "Halfway House" that is never skipped, even if it falls well outside lunchtime.

"Americans can come here, play all the best courses, live like kings, and feel like it cost nothing," says Richardson of Legend. "The only golf club in the whole country that is remotely difficult to get on is Leopard Creek, and still, any top tour operator can do that."

There are two main ways to plan a golf trip to South Africa. Avid golfers or course collectors can move around and cherry pick the nation's top-rated courses, which are geographically diverse, while those seeking a more varied South African golf vacation with other sights will want to focus more on a few key areas that also allow access to other top attractions. So while Durban offers the nation's best urban golf, Cape Town is its most alluring city, and has more than satisfactory golf offerings close by. Which one you visit depends on your priority: the very best golf or the very best vacation experience. Fortunately you do not have to make many of these compromises, as the nation's true must-visit golf resort, Fancourt, is centrally located and easily accessed, and the most seemingly remote pilgrimage course, Leopard Creek, ties in beautifully with what is far and away the country's top safari destination, Kruger National Park, and its surrounding bevy of ultra-luxury private reserve game lodges.



Source: CIGAR AFICIONADO ©2017

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LEOPARD CREEK

LEOPARD CREEK

RATING: A

Thanks to its dramatic setting abutting Kruger National Park, this is the best-known course in the country after the Links at Fancourt, and it hosted the European Tour's 2016 kickoff event, the Alfred Dunhill Championship. It is also the most expensive and difficult to arrange a tee time on. Nine-time major winner and South African Gary Player, the only non-American golfer to manage a career Grand Slam, has designed more than 300 courses worldwide in the past 30 years, but this is arguably his best. For five straight years *Golf Digest South Africa* rated it the nation's No. 1, and also gave it tops for conditioning, while most impressively, London's *Telegraph* rated it the fourth best course on earth. It has what is easily the fanciest clubhouse in the nation, GPS-equipped carts, high-end rental clubs, and its unique and memorable signature, different large bronze leopard statues at every tee, which, when taken in sequence, represent a day in the animal's life.

The manicured course starts slowly with wide, tree-lined fairways, helping golfers who have traveled a long way get their rhythm, and then really hits its stride on the fifth hole, after which it just keeps getting better and better—the front closes strongly with a par-4 to a peninsula green from which you might see crocodiles in the water. The front nine has a parkland feel, carved beautifully from open land, while the back side is wilder, following the contours of the untamed river, all that separates the course from world-famous Kruger National Park. The signature hole, 13, is a 520-yard par-5 that plays down to a green complex set dramatically at the edge of the river, and while approaching or putting you can often see hippos, and in many cases elephants on the other side of the water. Player keeps the drama and eye candy building right to the end, finishing with another stunning par-5 featuring an island green. Despite its impeccable and award-winning grooming, one big allure of Leopard Creek is that



Leopard Creek is a stunning course that hosted the 2016 Alfred Dunhill Championship (above). The signature 13th hole (top) is a par-5 that plays downhill to a river, where hippos and elephants are often seen.

Player carved the course from the wilderness, and managed to retain an ambiance of someplace that feels truly wild.

There is no better combination of great golf, great lodging and great wildlife viewing on earth than Leopard Creek. The club has partnered with 15 prominent safari lodges in and around Kruger, including the most luxurious and world-renown dream destinations (Royal Malewane, Singita, Londolozi) to offer guests golf privileges here. As a result, a day at Leopard Creek is no ordinary round of great golf: the most typical way to play Leopard Creek is during a stay at one of these luxe lodges, and while some guests charter helicopters, most have a ranger drive them to the course through the National Park and private wildlife reserves in game vehicles, with an extensive safari opportunity in both directions, for a unique golf day unlike any in the world. Leopard Creek also works with tour operators and will entertain direct requests from members of top-rated private clubs.



FANCOURT

FANCOURT RESORT

RATING: B TO A+ (MULTIPLE COURSES)

This is the Pebble Beach of South Africa, the most storied and full-service luxury golf resort in the land, with the nation's most desirable course and two other very good ones. The resort famously hosted the Presidents Cup, and the lodging built for the event, villas for the pro golfing guests, are now available to everyone. There's a lavish spa, full golf academy, four-hole practice course (pars 3, 4 and 5), extensive kids' facilities, pools, shops, several bars and restaurants, but most of all there is the Links at Fancourt (A+), which vies only with Leopard Creek as Gary Player's top design in the world. It is an inland links in the mold of the Kings and Queens courses at Glen deagles, Scotland, or the Straits course at Wisconsin's Whistling Straits, but better than all those—it is quite simply the best links course in the world that is not on the water. Fancourt is in George, which has a convenient airport and sits on the 250-mile Garden Route, a famous scenic drive along the coast of the Western Cape that is in turn one of South Africa's biggest tourist attractions. Within easy striking distance of the resort are safari game lodges, coastal cruises and whale watching,

TIPS ON GOLFING IN SOUTH AFRICA



GETTING THERE: South Africa Airways flies non-stop to Johannesburg daily from New York (JFK) and direct (with a stop in Ghana) from Washington, D.C. The airline also has a vast internal route of domestic flights within the country, and as a Star Alliance member, is partnered and codeshares with United. You'll find the best premium-class service on European carriers such as British Airways and Virgin, but these require a change in London or another European hub, though this can make it possible to fly direct into Cape Town.

BRING THE STICKS: It is heartily recommended that you bring your own clubs. While the finest courses have modern club rentals, even at many higher-end spots these tend to be a literal mixed bag. However,

if you are combining a higher-end safari with golf, many of the top lodges are accessible only by small planes with strict weight limitations on baggage. For this reason, if your trip is more complex than Cape Town and a single golf resort visit, which is easy to plan on your own, it is highly advisable to use the services of a specialty golf tour or safari operator, or an experienced travel agent at home. Only a few top courses have caddies, clubs are very professionally run and welcoming, and better courses have practice facilities, full pro shops and good maintenance.

DINE AFTER NINE: When you golf in South Africa, you take a break after nine holes for a meal. Much to the consternation of fast-paced, 36-hole per day junkies, it is generally not acceptable to go from the ninth green to tenth tee without this break—even if you are not hungry. This 20 to 30 minute pause is built in, and it is poor form to skip the group ahead while they have a savory English-style pie or sausage roll and beer. Almost all greens fees, even at the nation's toniest club, Leopard Creek, include lunch.

BANG FOR YOUR RAND: Prices for playing here are shockingly low. At the standout Fancourt's Links greens fees are less than 1,750 rand (about \$130) including lunch, while in the clubhouse two Johnnie Walker Blacks and a draught beer cost all of eight bucks. That's high-end: at the Legend,

18 holes with cart and lunch is less than \$45, and dinners at the best restaurants of Cape Town or wine country run a third or less of their equivalents in the United States.

CHOOSE A LOCAL TOUR OPERATOR: The major U.S.-based companies that handle the U.K. do not, for the most part, do South Africa, so go with a local specialist. The big three are Ascot Golf Travel, Pro Golf Africa Safaris and Golf in South Africa. Ozzie's Golf Guide specializes in just the greater Cape Town region. Top-tier safari specialists also frequently add on golf itineraries, and are also very well-versed in all travel tangentially related to luxury safaris including wine country, urban hotels and restaurants. The best in the U.S. is Micato Safaris, perennially named No. 1 by most travel magazines and industry awards.

EXPECT A LONG TRIP: Plan for at least a dozen days to do it right. "It's a minimum 12-day stay with three stops: Cape Town and Winelands, the Garden Route, and safari," says Carl Reinders of Pro Golf Africa Safaris. For first-time visitors he suggests four nights in Cape Town as a start, followed by the Garden Route and Fancourt. Seeing the animals is a must, which means either a visit to Kruger or safari in the Eastern Cape. For safari veterans who want more golf? Start in Johannesburg first before heading out toward Cape Town.

—L.O.



THE LINKS AT FANCOURT

and numerous wineries. There are also several more notable golf courses nearby, all rated in the country's Top 30, including St. Francis Bay (B+), a Jack Nicklaus Signature course; dramatic Pinnacle Point (B+), a breathtaking though convoluted peninsular course similar to New Zealand's Cape Kidnappers; Oobai (B), a coastal Ernie Els design famed for its island green par-3 set against the Indian Ocean; Pezula, a beautiful coastal modern links that was named Best New Course in the country when it opened in 2001; and the venerable George Golf Club (B), known locally as "The Old Course" after nearly eight decades of play.

On the first tee of the Links, a starter takes your lunch order to be enjoyed at the halfway house (you won't return to this spot until 18), you greet your caddie, and start the round with a ceremonial toast of whisky from a crystal decanter. The walking-only layout is the sole certified Audubon Sanctuary in the country, complete with resident mongoose and caracal, a rare small member of the big cat family. Because the kind of turf that lines the walls of Scottish pot bunkers doesn't exist here, Player used revetted walls made with shaped tubes of sand stacked on top of one another, making a stunning visual when viewed from the tee box. These memorable hybrid pot/fairway bunkers are everywhere, the course's defining characteristic, and while very scary are also surprisingly playable. The signature hole, 15, wraps around a lake and has gorgeous bunkering bleeding right into the water. It is the top-rated course in the country by South Africa's *Golf Digest*, and justifiably so. "Three years ago we had this group of American golfers come, they had booked to play all these other courses around, but they played the Links their first day, then canceled everything and just played it four more days in a row," says Martindale.

Fancourt has two other courses. The Montagu (A-), ranked sixth in South Africa, was extensively redesigned eight years ago by David McLay Kidd of Bandon Dunes and the Castle Course at St Andrews fame, and is an excellent parkland course, very playable, impeccably maintained, extensively planted with flowers, and built around several water hazards—in short, it's the Augusta of South Africa, with very strong par-3s and a dramatic par-5 finishing hole over water. The Outeniqua (B) is designed and promoted as an easier to play "introductory" golf experience, but it is a legitimate 18-hole course ranked in the Top 20 in the country.



MONTAGU

Fancourt Resort is called the Pebble Beach of South Africa for its wide array of fine courses. The Links at Fancourt (top) may be the best inland links course in the world. Montagu (above) was recently redesigned.

DURBAN COUNTRY CLUB & ZIMBALI GOLF CLUB

RATING: B TO A (MULTIPLE COURSES)

While Durban Country Club (A) is generally considered the nation's second or third best course—and it's better than ever after recent renovations—this gem is often overlooked simply because Durban itself is often overlooked. From the coastal setting to the dunes to the social clubhouse, its walls lined with lists of past champions, DCC evokes the most Scottish feel in the country, and has a rich history: opened in 1922, it has hosted the South African Open 17 times, more than any other course. Gary Player won his first (and seventh) Open here, while Ernie Els won his third (and fifth). The signature hole is the risk/reward drivable par-4 18th, and one foursome memorably closed by making scores of one, two, three and four, something that has likely never occurred in any other round of golf



FAIRMONT'S ZIMBALI RESORT



LEGEND SAFARI

The Fairmont Zimbali Resort (top) features lavish accommodations and a golf course designed by Tom Weiskopf. A safari (above) is part of the charm of Legend, where you can see rhino, lions, leopards and more.

ever played. Its rolling seaside dunes are covered with thick tropical vegetation, unusual for a links-style layout, and with swirling winds and pot bunkers, hitting fairways is essential. The city has enveloped the course over decades, so you hear revelers on the beach and a busy motorway during a round, and since the 2010 Soccer World Cup, several holes have prominent views of the architecturally impressive Moses Mabhida Stadium, which hosted the finals. In the 1990s, DCC took over the adjacent Beachwood (B) golf course, now its second 18, ranked in the nation's Top 30. This hidden gem is overshadowed by its big sibling, but is more of true links, on the coast, and uniquely situated at the end of a small airport with planes landing and taking off almost directly overhead. It's worth playing after or before the main event if you have the time for 36.

The Fairmont's Zimbali (B+) is one of the few top courses in South Africa designed by an American other than Jack Nicklaus—British Open and South African PGA Champ Tom Weiskopf. A hilly course set just inland, Zimbali is carved through really thick African bush, but its elevation offers some exceptional views of the Indian Ocean. Designed more like a private club than resort course, it has lots of elevation change, a fair amount of water, more than a few blind shots and enough natural real estate where you can rarely see another hole from the one you are playing, for a nice escapist feel. It's an upscale, well-maintained facility, and conveniently within the grounds of the deluxe Fairmont Zimbali resort. While this is an easy turnkey choice for golfers visiting Durban, it is worth noting that the city's finest lodging choice is the Oyster Box, a world-renowned gourmand boutique beach resort where the Princess of Monaco held her wedding reception.

LEGEND GOLF & SAFARI RESORT

RATING: B+

This is a one-of-a kind property. In addition to the helicopter Extreme 19 par-3, it also is the only course on earth designed by 18 different legendary professional golfers, representing 16 countries. The design is excellent but the maintenance not up to snuff. It's the rare golf resort that is also a full-blown safari property with its own on-site game drives and the most desirable animals, including rhino, lions, elephants, giraffes, zebras and leopards. There are guided bush walks, hot-air ballooning, stargazing and more, with rooms laid out in cottages across the vast property. Legend is located within the vast Entabeni Game Reserve in Limpopo, South Africa's northernmost province, a 35-minute flight or easy 2 1/2-hour drive north of Johannesburg.



SOUTHERN WINE

A golf trip to South Africa calls for a detour at one of the country's outstanding wineries **BY JAMES MOLESWORTH**

It's doubtful you managed to keep your eye on the ball during your entire 18 holes—South Africa is one of the most visually stunning countries you're likely to ever visit. After your round, you may want to take in some of that beauty at a different 19th hole, say a winery.

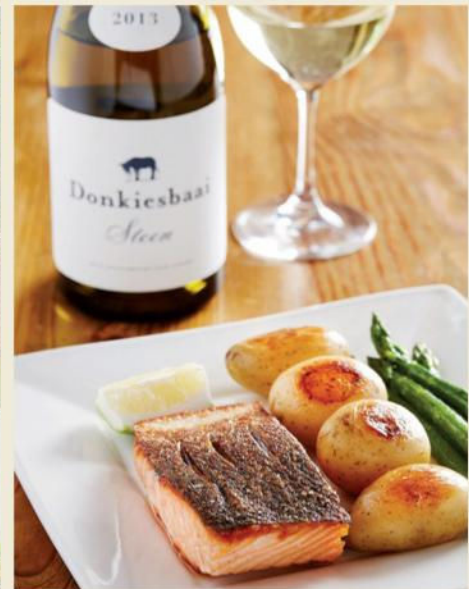
South Africa's wine industry dates back to the 17th century colonization of the Cape by European settlers—mainly Dutch and French. They came with a hodgepodge of grapevines, and eventually built a good little business until phylloxera ravaged the vineyards in the 19th century. When they rebuilt, Cape wine growers tended to focus on quantity rather than quality, making jug wines and brandy. When apartheid ended, opening South Africa to the rest of the world, the wine industry realized it had been well outpaced by improvements around the globe. They quickly retooled and today their industry is world class.

The main hub of South Africa's wine country is in Stellenbosch, a short drive from Cape Town. Stellenbosch is essentially a valley with several wine trails extending out from the bustling university town of the same name, like spokes on a wheel. There is no shortage of options.

Among the best include Rust En Vrede, whose wines earn consistently outstanding ratings in *Wine Spectator*, CIGAR AFICIONADO's sister publication. A visit here will have you thinking of the lush tasting rooms in California's Napa Valley, with quality service to guide you through the winery's racy Cabernet Sauvignon-based reds. Owner Jean Engelbrecht, a former rugby star and airline pilot, extends his hospitality with an outdoor bistro, where you can take your cigar during dinner hours. His gastronomique restaurant, serving dinner only, is considered among the elite dining spots in all of the country. Six courses with wine is a mere 1,450 rand (\$108) per person.

Right next door is golfing legend Ernie Els' namesake winery, which sports stunning views of the vineyards, a ceremonial tee overlooking them, and some serious golfing hardware on display inside. As smooth as the Big Easy's swing is his Signature red, a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend that's earned 93 points from *Wine Spectator*.

Heading out towards Somerset West, you'll come across 96 Winery Road, the tasting room and restaurant run by Ken Forrester. Forrester's eponymous winery has made a name for itself with wines made from the white Chenin Blanc grape, along with a handful of other bottlings. The



setting is rustic and charming, set right in one of Forrester's old vine vineyards. In particular, the steaks have an excellent reputation. Showing a sleeker, more modern style is the tasting room and restaurant at Tokara Estate, a top producer of reds and whites from blue-chip varietals such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay.

Also worth a visit are the tasting rooms in Constantia, a verdant and tony suburb of Cape Town. Top estates include Klein Constantia and Buitenverwachting, both of which emphasize fresh, steely whites.

A stop at any of these estates is sure to please a wine lover, and showcase some of the wine world's more stunning vineyards.

James Molesworth is a senior editor of Wine Spectator magazine.

Arabella, designed by Jack Nicklaus, is the best golf course in Cape Town. It is set next to a lagoon so large it resembles an ocean.

ARABELLA

CAPE TOWN & WINE COUNTRY

RATING: B TO A- (MULTIPLE COURSES)

Sandwiched between Table Mountain and the coast, with a gorgeous peninsula drive to the south, an infamous former island penitentiary turned top tourist site in its harbor, and the nation's premier wine regions just inland, the comparisons between Cape Town and San Francisco are obvious, except Cape Town has much better weather and beautiful beaches. Most first-time visitors consider a stay here *de rigueur*, and while it is entirely possible to visit the two major wine towns, South Africa's Napa and Sonoma, Franschhoek and Stellenbosch, for the day, many find it preferable to overnight in the vineyards, home to many luxury resorts. The same goes for golf: Cape Town's best courses are sufficiently far from town (90 minutes) to bring overnighting into consideration, though the city's nighttime charms are many.

The top Cape Town area course is Arabella (A-), set at the foot of the impressive Kogelberg Mountains and overlooking a lagoon so vast it appears ocean-like. On just about everyone's Top 10 list for the country, it is part of a full-service luxury resort, the Arabella Hotel & Spa. The other top area pick is the Nicklaus Signature Pearl Valley (B+), which has hosted the South African Open three times and was inaugurated with a friendly match between the Golden Bear and longtime friend Gary Player. A parkland course with an imposing amount of water hazards set in a valley beneath the Drakenstein Mountains, it too makes most national Top 10 lists and is also part of an eponymous luxury wine country resort. A third self-contained resort of note is Steenberg (B), closest to the city (just 30 minutes) and the most wine-centric, with an onsite tasting room and several fairways flanked immediately by grapevines. While less highly ranked, it is a fun and good-looking course with a memorable peninsula-style island green hole, towering mountain panoramas, and a welcoming joviality that extends to the gracious resort and fine dining eatery.

Other top area choices include Erinvale (B) and Royal Cape (B), the nation's oldest club since 1885. Ebrahim "Ozzie" Osman, a licensed South Africa tour operator, runs Ozzie's Golf Guide, specializing in day play around the city, complete with transfers, rental clubs and introductions to playing with members, perfect for business travelers or vacationers looking to sneak in one round. Ozzie says, "We've got 26 golf clubs around the city, and 10 are within six miles." Within Cape Town, the top hotel choices are the downtown Taj, the waterfront One & Only and the boutique suburban Ellerman House, a sort of combination luxury resort and art museum.

SUN CITY

RATING: B TO A- (MULTIPLE COURSES)

Many top travel agents shy away from Sun City in favor of more luxurious resorts because it has an artificial, Disney-esque feel, similar to the Atlantis resort in the Bahamas, including a vast waterpark. But it does offer a casino and turnkey convenience with four hotels, tons of restaurants and bars, extensive outdoor activities, two nearby safari reserves with game drives and two notable golf courses. The walking-only Gary Player Country Club (A-) is one of the nation's very best, on par with Leopard Creek, and hosts the annual Nedbank Challenge, a big tournament. At nearly 8,000 yards it is one of the longer courses in the world, and the parkland design setup offers panoramic mountain views, lots of water and very good conditioning. The Lost City course (B), also by Player, is more-resort style, allows carts and has more varied terrain, with elevation changes and desert stretches. Its signature is a truly hazardous water hazard on 13—it's home to Nile crocodiles.

"I've always loved The Lost City Golf Course, and with it being the venue for our charity tournament that has done so much good over the years," says Player. Like Legend, Sun City is a 2 1/2-hour drive from Johannesburg, but there is no flying option.



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STETYN CITY

Johannesburg is a natural first-stop for Americans traveling to South Africa, as the city provides the only nonstop service from North America. The Stetyn City course (above), designed by Jack Nicklaus, is reminiscent of Shadow Creek, with streams, waterfalls and top-tier amenities.

STETYN CITY, JOHANNESBURG

RATING: B

Because it is the sole nonstop gateway from North America, most U.S. visitors arrive via Johannesburg, giving them a big time savings over changing in Europe. While it is neither the golf nor tourism attraction that Cape Town is, it does boast the Cradle of Mankind, a World Heritage Site that has yielded some of the most important discoveries in the study of human evolution, and is one of the nation's most popular attractions. Stetyn City is a new upscale suburban mixed-use residential community anchored by a top-flight golf course that opened in 2015, and is the top

choice in the area. Another Nicklaus design, this is an American-style course with the highest maintenance standards, lots of rock-strewn streams and waterfalls, reminiscent of Las Vegas gem Shadow Creek, with first-rate clubhouse and amenities all around. It makes an especially comfortable welcome into South African golf for playing on day of arrival. The course is conveniently owned by the developer of the Saxon Hotel, the city's finest, complete with butlers, in the posh Sandhurst suburb, and the Saxon makes transfers and tee times easy for its guests, who have included President Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Sir Paul McCartney and the late Nelson Mandela, who stayed in the presidential suite (which now bears his name) long enough to write his entire memoir. ❖

Larry Olmsted is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.



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MEAN GREEN LUXURY MACHINES



Once the purview of the eco-minded, sensible set, battery-electric vehicles are making their charge as high-end rides with plenty of performance BY PAUL A. EISENSTEIN



The Faraday Future FF91 packs 1,000 horsepower to propel it off the line at neck-snapping speeds. And all the beast's brawn is generated by two electric motors.

BMW's i brand includes this i8, a plug-in, hybrid sports car, and the i3, a city car. More models are on the way.



Blink and you're likely to miss it. Pumping out a jaw-dropping 1,000 horsepower, the new FF91 is not only one of the world's most powerful automobiles, but it's also the fastest. Launching from 0 to 60 in a blistering 2.39 seconds, it will leave even the Ferrari 488 GTB eating its dust. That's all the more impressive when you realize the first production model from the California-based, Chinese-funded Faraday Future is powered by two electric motors.

If your idea of a battery-electric vehicle is a slow, boring econobox that can barely get you to work and back without running out of juice, you better think twice. Products like the Faraday Future FF91, Tesla Model S P90d, Porsche Mission E, Karma Revero and BMW i8 are among a growing list of electrified automobiles that are mean, as well as green. The idea of using electric propulsion in luxury and performance cars might seem a contradiction. But it is quickly becoming the rule, rather than the exception. That's due, in part, to ever-tougher emissions and fuel economy standards. Automotive engineers have also discovered that battery drivetrains can deliver tremendous amounts of power to go with their improved mileage and reduced emissions.

You might not glimpse the future by looking at the current numbers. Add up all the conventional hybrids, plug-in hybrids and pure battery-electric vehicles—HEVs, PHEVs and BEVs—sold in 2016 and they account for barely 3.5 percent of the total American new car market. (The story isn't much different in Europe or Japan.) Yet, industry analysts predict that a decade from now, electrified models could account for as much as a third of global vehicle sales, while dominating the luxury and performance

segments. When Ford Motor Co. is planning a hybrid Mustang and Aston Martin is readying an all-electric version of its four-door sports car, to be called the RapidE, you know the industry is getting turned on.

Anyone who thought battery power is just for a select niche of techies and greenies would have clearly come away with a very different opinion after touring last autumn's Paris Motor Show. All they had to do was ask Daimler AG Chairman and CEO Dieter Zetsche, who assured a media audience that the Mercedes-Benz brand is moving electric vehicles "into the fast lane."

The German automaker had already committed to putting 10 plug-in hybrids and several pure battery-electric models into production over the next several years. But at the Paris show, Zetsche helped lift the covers off the Mercedes Generation EQ concept, a show car that will make the transition into a production model before the end of the decade. And it will anchor an entirely new brand-within-a-brand called Mercedes EQ. "The emission-free automobile is the future," Zetsche announced.

Mercedes EQ is far from unique. Its Bavarian archrival actually got there first with the launch of its own sub-brand, BMW i. It currently offers several different electrified options: the \$141,000 plug-in hybrid i8 sports car and, for those on a tighter budget, the \$42,000 all-electric i3 city car. "A new era of mobility is about to begin," the CEO Harald Krueger said during a media roundtable in Los Angeles a few months back that followed the unveiling of an assortment of BMW show cars. While there are no immediate plans to build the BMW Vision 100 concept, the little i brand will get at least two more models over the next few years, including a roadster version of the i8.



Mercedes looks to an emission-free future with its EQ, a concept car planned for production. It will anchor the company's electric brand-within-a-brand.

European automakers were initially slow to embrace electrification—largely due to their historical focus on high-mileage diesels—but that’s rapidly changing, and for several reasons. Battery technology improvement is one factor. Increasingly stringent global emissions and mileage standards is another. There’s also the backlash from Volkswagen AG’s costly and embarrassing diesel emissions scandal. The automaker had long promised its newest “oil burners” could deliver solid mileage, great performance and extremely low emissions. But, in a word, it lied, resorting to highly sophisticated software code that could detect when one of its VW, Audi or Porsche diesel models was undergoing emissions tests and briefly modify engine settings to meet U.S. standards. Otherwise, the engines would spew out as much as 40 times the mandated pollution limits.

While VW is struggling to find a fix, company officials also announced in Paris that they will launch a battery-based sub-brand, VW I.D., with at least 30 plug-based models set to reach market by 2025. And that doesn’t include the various plug-ins and BEVs coming from the German giant’s numerous upscale brands. Bentley, for one, is about to launch a PHEV version of its new Bentayga sport-utility vehicle, and even Lamborghini will have a plug-in option for the Urus SUV it is developing.

Then there’s Audi, which already markets an assortment of PHEV models, such as the A3 e-tron. The mid-range luxury marque has even bigger plans in the works. The brand’s CEO Rupert Stadler recently forecasted that 25 to 30 percent of Audi’s sales will come from electrified models by 2025. He hinted that at least three models are already in the works, including an all-electric midsize SUV. Due to market in 2018, it will serve as an alternative to the popular Q5 ute and likely be called the Q6 e-tron.

Many of the new plug-based models are utility vehicles, perhaps no surprise, considering that in the U.S. market SUVs, pickups and vans now account for nearly two-thirds of all new vehicle sales, with demand growing in overseas markets as diverse as Berlin and Beijing. Alternative power sources can help SUVs and other light trucks, with their large sizes and poorer aerodynamics, meet increasingly stringent government mileage and emissions mandates. Jaguar’s new F-Pace has been on sale for less than a year, but it’s already the brand’s best-seller. So, it seems logical that the British marque’s new I-Pace concept is also an SUV—in this case, however, one powered by a twin-motor electric driveline. While similar in overall size to the F-Pace, the prototype has a decidedly different look and proportions. Its distinctive cab-forward design is meant to maximize the benefits of battery propulsion. That means neck-snapping acceleration as well as the passenger and cargo space usually found in a size class above it.

“Electrification gives us the opportunity to tear up the [design] rule-book,” said Ian Callum, Jaguar’s design director, during a media background briefing ahead of the official I-Pace debut at November’s L.A. Auto Show. Like almost all of the latest battery-electric vehicles, the I-Pace—which will go into production in two years—uses a platform that’s something like a giant skateboard. Its batteries are integrated into the vehicle load floor, with the motors mounted onto the front and rear axles. Without a big engine under the hood, much of that space can be repurposed, yielding a cavernous interior despite the concept’s modest exterior footprint.

It’s a layout you’ll be seeing more frequently in the future and, with automakers also rushing to put autonomous technology into production early in the next decade, it will make it possible for passengers and drivers alike to swivel seats and transform their vehicles into living rooms on wheels.

Expect to see virtually every major, high-line automaker add new plug-based models, as well as conventional hybrids, to their lineups by the end

of the decade. You’ll also see a lot of new names enter a business that had been all but closed to start-ups since the end of the Second World War. None is as ambitious as Tesla Motors, founded by the visionary South African entrepreneur Elon Musk—who also started up the private SpaceX rocket service. Musk was intent on building a rocket on wheels, starting with the limited-production two-seat Tesla Roadster. It’s pushing the performance envelope even further with its two current product lines, the Model S sedan and Model X utility vehicle. Equipped with the optional Ludicrous Mode—the name lifted from the Mel Brooks movie *Spaceballs*—they can speed from 0 to 60 in less than three seconds. In fact, with that optional performance package, the Model S is so fast that it’s the first production car ever to generate more than one full G of acceleration—in other words, it could out-accelerate the force of gravity.



Jaguar’s I-Pace mimics its popular new F-Pace as an SUV, but with a different shape that maximizes its battery propulsion and cargo space.

But an assortment of new rivals want to topple Tesla from its performance perch. That includes the likes of Faraday Future, which is building a new factory near Las Vegas to start building its FF91 hypercar in 2018. With about 60 percent more power than the Model S with Ludicrous Mode, it’s several tenths of a second faster off the line. Another promising start-up is Lucid Motors, which is billing its \$140,000 Lucid Air as a “private jet on wheels.” It not only matches the FF91’s 1,000 horsepower, but equips its cabin with Bentley-esque features, such as rear seats that can fold nearly flat.

Performance is one thing, but the plug-in vehicles now coming to market aim to overcome another serious obstacle to consumer acceptance: dreaded “range anxiety.” There are several ways to accomplish this. One is the plug-in hybrid—sometimes known as an extended-range electric vehicle. The new BMW 530e, which comes to market by the middle of this year, is a good example. It pairs a turbocharged four-cylinder engine with an electric motor, drawing power from a modest-sized lithium-ion battery pack able to yield about 30 miles per charge. Studies show that’s enough for the typical American worker’s daily commute. But for longer drives, the gas engine takes over when the battery runs down. The combination powertrain requires little to no sacrifice, notes Ludwig Willisch, the CEO of BMW’s North American operations, delivering the same performance as the pure, gas-powered 530i model.

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Tesla Model S 100d is the current mileage-range champ at 300 a charge. The plummeting price of kilowatt-hours makes it possible.



“We think plug-ins will be the most popular solution,” at least in the near-term, for most buyers, says Willisich, and most of BMW’s key competitors seem to agree, considering there will be north of 30—and possibly as many as 40—luxury plug-in hybrids on the market by the beginning of the coming decade.

But some green car proponents contend that PHEVs are just a stop-gap solution. Count Tesla’s Musk among them. His answer to range anxiety is to pack more—and more powerful—batteries into his products. The new Model S 100d is the current mileage champ, the first production electric vehicle to top 300 miles a charge. But, again, rivals aren’t ceding that title to Tesla. Audi is aiming for as much as 400 miles in range with its Q6 e-tron, and the FF91 and Lucid Air are targeting similar numbers. There’s a good shot we’ll see battery cars soon hitting 500 miles, or double what a typical car can deliver between fill-ups.

Only a few years ago, that would have priced electric vehicles out of the hands of all but the most affluent motorists. But there’s a revolution underway with lithium-ion technology. Batteries are not only becoming smaller, lighter and more powerful, but far more affordable. When Nissan launched the world’s first mass-production battery-electric vehicle, the Leaf, in 2010, a kilowatt-hour of lithium cells cost about \$1,000. Its 24 kWh pack—barely good enough for 100 miles a charge—cost the factory \$24,000. While most manufacturers treat battery data like a state secret, General Motors has revealed it is paying less than \$150 a kilowatt-hour for the cells in its new Chevrolet Bolt EV. Its 60 kWh pack, capable of 238 miles per charge, costs less than \$10,000.

That still must come down. The Boston Consulting Group estimates batteries eventually will need to drop below \$100 per kWh to make EVs cost-competitive with conventional gas models. But that could be reached before the end of the decade.

There’s yet another challenge to widespread acceptance: keeping your EV charged. When the Leaf hit market just seven years ago, there were only a few thousand of the faster, 240-volt Level 2 public charging facilities across the entire U.S. But as of late last year, the U.S. Department of Energy counted 14,349 of them, capable of handling more than 36,000 vehicles at a time—and that doesn’t include the tens of thousands of chargers EV owners have installed. While many of these are publicly

operated, there’s growing corporate support, with a number of private ventures, such as ChargePoint, expecting to tap into a lucrative business opportunity in the coming years. “It won’t be long before drivers start suffering from ‘gas anxiety,’ not range anxiety,” says ChargePoint CEO Pasquale Romano.

The numbers are expected to continue to grow—in some communities, new housing and commercial projects must add chargers. But, equally important, there are starting to be more super-fast, Level 3 chargers that can give a Tesla Model S P100d an 80 percent top-off in 30 to 60 minutes. (Tesla itself is setting up a proprietary network of high-speed Superchargers across North America.) That means you can now travel from San Francisco, say, to Los Angeles, make a lunch stop along the way and have your car ready to go before you’re done eating. In Europe, meanwhile, a public-private consortium that includes BMW, Daimler, Ford and the various Volkswagen AG brands will soon begin rolling out ultra-fast Level 4 chargers. A Chevrolet Bolt could get an 80 percent recharge in 10 minutes or less.

Not everyone is convinced the technology will carve out a significant niche—never mind completely supplant the time-tested internal combustion engine. The challenge remains to drive down costs and install enough fast chargers to satisfy a growing universe of plug-in models.

And automotive engineers working on gas and diesel powertrains are not throwing in the towel. An assortment of promising technologies could yield significant improvements in fuel economy while delivering still better performance and emissions numbers. Mazda is expected to launch one such breakthrough late next year in the next-generation Mazda3 model. Dubbed the homogeneous-charge compression ignition, or HCCI, it has many of the positive attributes of the diesel engine—using compression, rather than spark plugs to ignite the air/fuel mixture—but runs on gasoline. HCCI should boost fuel efficiency by 30 percent compared with traditional gas engines.

Then there’s Achates, a San Diego-based research and engineering firm, which has contracts from seven different automakers to develop something called the opposed-piston engine, or OP-E. It uses two pistons per cylinder and also relies on compression, rather than spark, ignition, doubling the mileage of a conventional gas engine. Nissan’s next-generation QX50 SUV will, for 2018, mark the debut of the Variable-Compression



Turbo engine, which can adjust its compression ratio from 8:1 to 14:1, depending upon demands for power and fuel economy. Cheap fuel and high-efficiency engines could set a tough hurdle for electric vehicles to clear.

Major automakers like VW, Toyota, Nissan and General Motors are straining their budgets trying to cover all the possible bases. The challenge could prove especially tough for start-ups like Tesla and Faraday Future. Musk and company have only rarely turned a profit—though they hope to get solidly into the black with next year's launch of the mid-priced Model 3 sedan. Faraday, meanwhile, has temporarily halted work on its Nevada assembly plant while it raises new capital.

No one knows more about the financial challenge of launching a new battery-car company than Henrik Fisker. The Danish car designer and entrepreneur's promising Fisker Automotive had a spectacular short circuit, declaring bankruptcy in 2013. Its assets, however, were purchased by China's Wanxiang Group which recently renamed the company Karma, and Fisker's plug-in hybrid model is itself now called the Revero. The name is new, as are a few subtle details, such as the grille and badge, but "The vehicle...is largely the same" as the old Fisker, says Jim Taylor, the long-time General Motors executive who is now serving as the COO of California-based Karma. Karma was the original name for the four-seat plug-in hybrid. Despite Fisker's financial problems, the sleek sports car received widespread praise for its styling and unique drivetrain. And so, with a few touches to bring it up to date, the new owners have brought it back.

On the outside, the Revero gets tweaks to the original "moustache" grille, as well as new wheels and eight new paint colors. There's also a new solar roof capable of producing enough power each day to travel another 1.5 miles in electric mode.

Interior electronics have all been updated. Like the original plug-in, Revero uses two electric motors, along with the gas engine. Karma is reportedly looking to replace that General Motors-sourced I-4 powerplant with a more sophisticated BMW engine. Even six years after it was first introduced, the sports car remains one of the sexiest vehicles on the road.

For all the technical challenges, politics are also likely to play a role in determining how big the battery-car market grows. America's new President Donald Trump has shown plenty of skepticism, among other things, about global warming, something he has labeled a Chinese "hoax." He is giving strong consideration to rolling back the 54.5 mpg CAFE (corporate average

Eco-friendly autos like (clockwise from top left) the Karma Revero, the Porsche Mission E concept and Lucid Motors' Air demonstrate the industry's faith in the green segment.

fuel economy) standard, as well as the \$7,500 federal tax credits for qualifying electric vehicles. Those moves, some worry, could cause the American market for green vehicles to collapse.

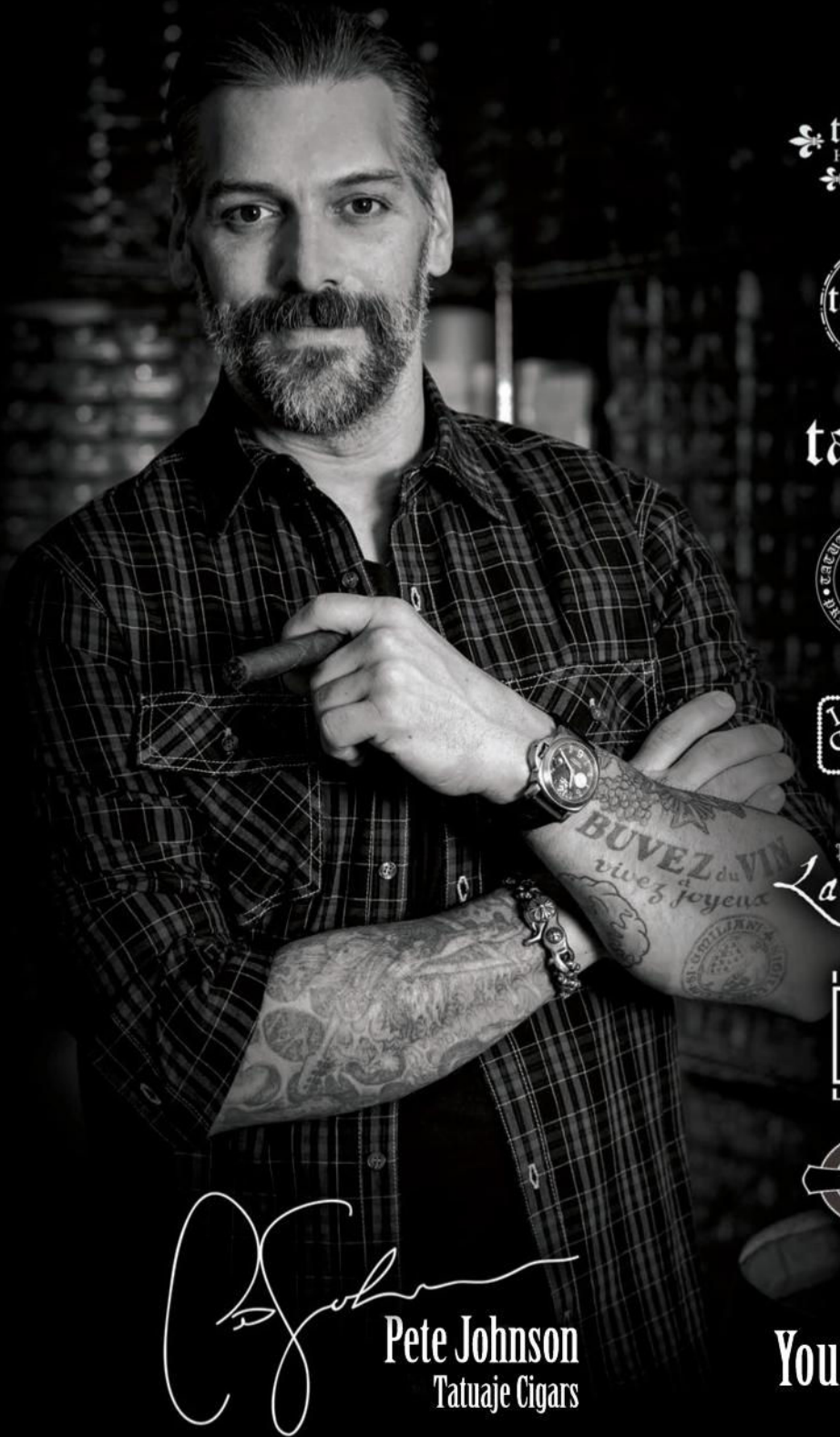
"The brief answer is that we don't know what will occur with a Trump administration and electric vehicles," says David Reichmuth, an executive with the Union of Concerned Scientists. But not everyone is quite so worried. "I don't think people are choosing electric cars only because of subsidies," says Annette Winkler, a senior executive with Daimler AG, and head of the German maker's Smart brand.

She also believes that even if the new administration pulls the plug, demand for electrified models will continue to grow in other markets where governments are far more committed to the technology. China is aggressively encouraging a switch to electric propulsion as an answer to its endemic smog problems. In some cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, there are monthly limits on new vehicle registrations—restrictions that don't apply to electric vehicles. In 2015, China became the world's largest market for plug-in models. Europe, meanwhile, is also encouraging electrification and a number of cities, such as Paris, are considering restrictions that might bar anything but zero-emissions vehicles. Germany, home of the Autobahn, has gone so far as to lay out preliminary plans to ban all internal combustion engine vehicles within the next two decades.

So, despite the challenges they still face, the future is looking increasingly positive for plug models, says Jaguar design chief Callum. "Our view is that electric cars are here to stay." ♦

Paul A. Eisenstein is publisher of the website TheDetroitBureau.com.

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Ti-chime Time

For centuries, ancient clock towers in European villages have marked the passing of time with the ringing of bells. In the 15th and 16th centuries, early watchmakers sought to replicate this ritual by producing timepieces with small bells in the movements. Technology advanced, and the first minute repeaters—watches that tell the time with music—emerged in Germany in the 1720s. Sixty years later, the visionary watchmaker Abraham-Louis Breguet advanced the art of striking watches by replacing bells with steel blades curved around the movement to produce a thinner watch with clearer sound. That paved the way for the modern minute repeater, which is widely considered watchmaking's ultimate complication. Minute repeater mechanisms eventually made their way into wristwatches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

When activated a minute repeater will chime the time to the nearest minute on demand. Tiny hammers strike finely tuned wire gongs, allowing you to count the hours, quarter hours and minutes, to discern the time musically rather than visually, which was helpful in the pre-electric age—or even today at times when it's inconvenient to view the watch dial. Not surprisingly, carrying a miniature version of a clock tower in your pocket, and later on your wrist, has always been a privilege of the very, very wealthy. Today's minute repeaters, especially when combined with other ne plus ultra complications, such as tourbillons, frequently climb into the mid-six figures and well above. But you don't have to be able to afford a minute repeater to appreciate the art form.

In recent years, even as the luxury watch market has suffered a lull, precious minute repeaters have undergone something of a renaissance with both old guard and

INNOVATIVE MINUTE REPEATERS
REVIVE WATCHMAKING'S ULTIMATE
COMPLICATION: A FUNCTION THAT
ANNOUNCES TIME WITH SOUNDS

BY LAURIE KAHLE

younger brands strutting their technical stuff while bringing the traditional minute repeater into the 21st century with unconventional, even avant-garde, designs and space-age materials, such as titanium and sapphire crystal. Computer technology is being leveraged to analyze the tones for purity and test for sound quality, and the old-world complication is being paired with contemporary practical functions such as GMTs and power reserves. Dials are opened up to reveal the mechanism in operation and to allow the sound to travel, and cases are also being tweaked to amplify sound. Overall, a number of innovations have advanced the minute repeater to become more reliable and less delicate, so it can be worn daily, rather than stored in a safe for a special occasion.

Arguably the most romantic and poetic watch complication, a minute repeater is a testament to the mastery of the watchmaker who produces it. And while they are now aided by modern technology that can scientifically test various parameters of the watch's performance, the beauty of the song is in the ear of the beholder, so the human element remains essential. Because each piece is painstakingly assembled and tuned by ear, each minute repeater is unique, like any other handmade musical instrument.

Patek Philippe, historically one of the most revered makers of minute repeaters, staged an event recently in which a number of its minute repeaters were tested side by side for comparison. To evaluate a minute repeater, you

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listen for certain qualities, such as a harmonious tone with a warm full pitch, rather than thin, metallic or sharp/flat notes. The volume and tempo should also be steady and consistent through the longest chime—12:59—which ideally lasts 18 to 20 seconds, per Patek Philippe. And the buzz created by the centrifugal governor mechanism that drives the hammers should be minimal so as not to distract from the song.

Achieving these goals requires a rare and studied expertise. For a watchmaker to know how to make a single gong correctly, he will have to make about 100 gongs in training. Then he must select the individual gongs for each watch, choosing from Patek Philippe's 21 different classes of gongs of differing diameters and lengths. Then the gongs must be soldered to the main plate correctly to avoid vibration that can spoil the sound. Fine-tuning follows, as the watchmaker trims the length of the gongs to produce an ideal sound.

In 2003, the brand, which produced its first minute repeater in 1845, was the first to use computer analysis of the notes to get an objective measure

Purchasers of Patek minute repeaters go through an application process designed to thwart speculators. “I want to...make sure they are being worn and not being used as baseball cards.”

of the quality of the sound. Once the watchmaker is satisfied, they place the watch in a safe-like box fitted with two microphones that feeds into a computer to create a “sound picture.” If the watch passes the analytics, it progresses to the head of the grand complications department for approval, and from there, the watchmaker who produced it presents it to Thierry Stern, Patek's president, who personally tests and approves each minute repeater before it leaves the factory. The song of each watch is stored on a computer so when the watch comes back for servicing or repair, they can test it to make sure its original sound is preserved before it is returned.

If you want to purchase this year's resolutely classical Ref. 5539G

Minute Repeater Tourbillon (price upon request, patek.com) with seconds sub-dial and blue enamel dial, or any other Patek minute repeater for that matter, you must first be approved by the brand, which initiated an application process to thwart speculators. “A few years back, people were buying these pieces, and they were not even being opened—they were stuck in a vault, and people were using them as speculative watches,” explains Larry Pettinelli, the brand's U.S. president. “Mr. Stern said, we're making so few of these, I want to know my customer and make sure they are being worn and not being used as baseball cards.”

Vacheron Constantin, another historic brand, also stayed true to aesthetic traditions with this year's Traditionnelle minute repeater tourbillon powered by the new hand-wound Caliber 2755 TMR, which was designed, developed and produced in-house in keeping with strict quality standards of the Hallmark of Geneva, or Geneva Seal, ensuring excellent finishing and performance criteria have been met. Available in rose gold (\$482,000, vacheron-constantin.com), considered superior for

sound propagation, and platinum (\$536,000), the watches' dials are engraved with a pattern exclusive to the brand using the 18th-century technique of hand-guilloché.

Despite a long history in the niche, Audemars Piguet took an avant-garde approach with the record-breaking Royal Oak Supersonnerie (520,000 Swiss francs,

audemarspiguet.com), which debuted as a concept piece last year and became available this year. Hailed as the loudest minute repeater ever produced, the Supersonnerie can be heard from across the room, while most repeaters require listeners to crane their ear to the wrist.

Even with its laundry list of patents, design innovations that amplify sound and a high-tech aesthetic, the Supersonnerie traces its origins to a 1924 watch in the brand's archive. Brand ambassador Claudio Cavaliere points out that during the 1920s and '30s, more people sang and played musical instruments for leisure, perhaps explaining why minute repeaters from that period were exceptional. “They were quite good at tuning




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musical instruments and good at tuning minute repeaters as well,” he says. “Like monks in the Middle Ages making good wines who had no idea why the wine was good, those watchmakers were capable of properly tuning the sound, but did not know exactly how.”

Now armed with modern technology, the brand could enlist engineers, musicians and acousticians to define 200 parameters that were influencing the sound, both technical and subjective, to replicate the tones of the vintage watch. “If you tune a piano just with a machine that measures the frequency, it doesn’t sound so good,” Cavaliere explains. “You need someone to tune it in a human way, where our brains perceive the frequencies the best. You can make a very pure sound technically, but if perception of that sound is ugly for the human brain, it’s not a good sound.” So while the machines can provide the watchmakers targets to measure up against, they still require the soulful qualities of the human ear and brain to complete the final tuning.

Aside from unprecedented volume, Audemars also sought to produce a minute repeater rugged enough to wear every day. And the Supersonnerie’s 44 mm titanium (a material hailed for sound-propagation qualities) is water-resistant to 20 meters, should you decide to take a dip with a half-million dollar watch strapped to your wrist.

Cartier also chose titanium for the latest version of its Rotonde de Cartier minute repeater flying tourbillon (price upon request, cartier.com) powered by the manual winding 9402 MC in-house movement, which is individually numbered and certified with the Geneva Hallmark.

For their first forays into the minute repeater field this year, Bulgari and Panerai took audaciously modern approaches to create stylish, contemporary repeaters that are robust enough to stand up to everyday wear and tear.

Bulgari’s Octo Finissimo Minute Repeater (\$155,000, bulgari.com) went a step further, claiming the record for the world’s thinnest minute repeater at 6.85 mm thick. “We wanted the minute repeater to be worn on the wrist, not stay in the safe,” says Guido Terreni, managing director of Bulgari Watches, who points out the bold, faceted case imparts a disruptive attitude that contrasts with the dial’s rather understated appearance.



A watchmaker places the minute hammer into the movement of a Chopard L.U.C. Full Strike, the company’s debut minute repeater.

“You bring it to life when you activate it,” he explains. “But when it is not functioning, it can seem an ordinary watch, and that’s part of the beauty of it.”

Sound propagation is a challenge in the compact confines of an ultra-thin case, which is the reason why they selected titanium for the metal. Bulgari’s engineers also opened up the dial, laser cutting the brand’s stylized numeric and stick indexes in the thin wafer of titanium to allow the sound to travel through the case. And like the aforementioned brands, Bulgari also tests the sound for intensity, tempo and the purity of the notes, among other parameters.

Panerai also focused on the case to enhance the sound of its Radiomir 1940 Minute Repeater Carillon Tourbillon GMT (price upon request, panerai.com), which is the most complicated watch the brand has ever built. Inside the red-gold case, which is constructed of two soldered halves, they hollowed out a channel to create an acoustic chamber that serves as an amplifier. The 5Npt alloy includes platinum, which adds density and weight to the metal, further enhancing resonance. Clients can also choose white gold and possibly even titanium down the road. The skeletonized movement imparts an edgy aesthetic to the Radiomir design, whose case proportions pay tribute to the brand’s original tool watches produced for the Italian Royal Navy in the mid-20th century. And in a modern twist, you can customize various elements including the case metal, finishes, hands and even the color of the luminous SuperLuminova markings.

The addition of a GMT (tracking two time zones) makes a contemporary statement, and, in an unprecedented flourish, the watch can chime both home and local times by manipulating the crown. The Radiomir is designed with four barrels, two dedicated to the time and the 30-second tourbillon, and the other two work the chiming mechanisms. Thanks to this, says Frederic Dreyer, Panerai’s director of research and development, “you can play with the chiming mechanism and you will never reduce the four-day power reserve of the movement, which is really nice.”



JAEGER-LECOULTRE

BREGUET

As Panerai prides itself on reliability, the team developed layered security systems to protect the movement from damage caused by unintended user error. Therefore, it is impossible to activate the repeater while you are setting the time and vice versa. “We have expertise in long power-reserve movements and chronographs, so the goal was the same: to make a reliable minute repeater,” says Dryer. The watch must pass shock tests as well as sound tests, and, it is water resistant down to 30 meters.

In another break from tradition, the Panerai has a decimal chiming sequence rather than the typical quarter format. In a melodic flourish, it is equipped with three hammers and three gongs, endowing it with the term carillon, a reference to a musical instrument with numerous bells. The chiming sequence allows you to determine the time in a format that parallels a digital watch. When you activate the push piece at 8 O’CLOCK, the watch strikes a single low note for hours, each 10-minute segment is

You cannot replace everything with technology. Machines cannot measure emotion. It’s like a sports car: you can measure the power, but you cannot measure the smile it puts on your face.

marked with a three-note high-to-low melody, and a single high note counts off the minutes. “The 10-minute chime pattern makes it easier to understand the time when you hear the song,” says Dreyer.

A. Lange & Söhne’s director of product development Anthony de Haas agrees, which is why last year’s Zeitwerk Minute Repeater (\$467,700, alange-soehne.com) is equipped with a decimal chime sequence. “We wanted to create a modern interpretation of a classical complication,” says de Haas. “A decimal system is more modern.”

Using a push button rather than a typical slide lever to activate the chiming sequence, Zeitwerk is also equipped with safety systems that prevent you from setting the time while the striking system is activated. Another feature disables the power-hungry repeater when power drains below 12 hours, which preserves time-keeping accuracy. A patented delay-of-time setting compensates for when the chiming sequence is started at the turn of the hour. For example, if you activate the repeater at 12:59, the hands will stay in place until after the sequence finishes, then they will instantly snap to the correct time.

De Haas points out that while it would have been expected for the German brand to launch its first striking watch in the über-classical 1815 range, he relished the element of surprise generated by introducing the Zeitwerk striking watch. “That’s the thing you should always try,” he says. “Because, to be honest, how many hundreds of years have mechanical watches been made? You have to be different, take a different approach, otherwise no one has a reason to buy your watches.”

Chopard debuted its first minute repeater, the L.U.C. Full Strike (price available on request, chopard.com) this year to mark the 20th anniversary of its manufacture in Fleurier, Switzerland. Chopard spent more than six years developing the showpiece that employs sapphire crystal—rather than metal—gongs to attain the acoustic quality of a silver spoon tapping a crystal goblet. The 42.5-mm case is made of the brand’s proprietary Fairmined rose gold, which is ethically sourced in South America. The clear sapphire gongs are connected to the dial crystal

creating the effect of a loudspeaker to amplify the sound, and an aperture at 10 O’CLOCK provides a window into the mechanism.

The calibre 08.01-L movement is the result of almost 15,000 hours of development. Like in other next-gen minute repeaters, the movement features security systems to prevent you from unintentionally damaging it. Move the crown in one direction to wind the movement and in the other direction to wind the striking mechanism, which has the energy capacity to strike 12:59 12 times. The dial features a double power reserve indicator at 2 O’CLOCK with superimposed hands that display the energy remaining in the strike mechanism’s reserve as well as the main movement’s reserve.

Jaeger-LeCoultre pioneered the concept of integrating gongs with the watch’s crystal to amplify sound, dubbing it “crystal gong.” The heel of the gong is soldered to the crystal that spans over the dial to magnify the sound created by two trebuchet hammers. The regulator that controls the energy delivered to the barrel of the minute repeater is nearly silent at 20 decibels, so nothing interferes with the pure sound of the notes. This year, Jaeger introduced the now-evolved technology in its first automatic minute repeater, the 39mm Master Grande Tradition Minute Repeater (\$180,000,

jaeger-lecoultre.com), which pays homage to 19th-century pocket watches. The mechanism is activated with the push of a button with its own built-in security system: if you push the button accidentally while the chime is ringing, it will not start again, preventing damage to the movement. The 22-karat pink gold oscillating weight bears the brand’s logo.

Breguet also took a novel approach to the development of the gongs in its Tradition Répétition Minutes Tourbillon (\$460,700, breguet.com), which debuted in 2015 and became available to order this year. Intending to rethink the minute repeater, which its founder Abraham-Louis Breguet played an integral part in developing, Breguet started with a blank slate. They sampled about 100,000 synthesized tones to choose two and then built the watch to reproduce them.

They also took a radical approach to the gongs, which spread horizontally across the dial—rather than encircling the movement—and attach to the bezel, which is designed to project the sound. The hammers of the striking mechanism, activated by a push button, strike the gongs vertically from beneath. Breguet even took poetic license with the classical minute repeater melody, rewriting the quarter-note chime to play low to high, instead of vice versa. The watch’s peripheral winding system provides you with an unimpeded view of all the mechanics at work.

While technology may have ushered in a new golden age of minute repeaters, it is still one of the hardest complications to industrialize, because the quality of the song relies on how it is perceived by people rather than machines. “The minute repeater was the last complication that was not, in a way, industrialized,” says Audemars Piguet’s Cavaliere. “You need specific know-how to make the finest tuning of the gongs. You need to get this balance with the technology helping the man to be better. You cannot replace everything with technology, specifically with sound. Machines cannot measure emotion. It’s like a sports car: you can measure the power, but you cannot measure the smile it puts on your face when you drive it.” ♦

Laurie Kahle writes regularly about timepieces for CIGAR AFICIONADO.



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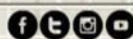


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cigars



116

CIGAR REVIEW

Our expert tasting panel reviews 81 cigars from around the world to judge their quality. One emerged as a classic, rating 95 points on our 100-point scale.

130

VINTAGE TASTING

A trip back in time as we sample two pre-Castro cigars, several vintage Cubans and a Miami-made La Gloria Cubana rolled in 1993.

133

RATINGS ANALYSIS

A close look at the ratings in *CIGAR AFICIONADO* and *Cigar Insider*. What countries outperformed the others in 2016? What shapes and sizes delivered the best—and worst—scores?

139

CUBA'S BLEND MASTERS

We look at the organization in Cuba that ensures consistency of the country's famed cigar blends.

JEFF HARRIS

churchills

It's the Churchill that all Churchills aspire to be, and the cigar that all enthusiasts hope to smoke at least once in their lives: The Cuban Cohiba Esplendido. It scored 95 points, which is classic on CIGAR AFICIONADO's 100-point scale, and is by far the most complex, sophisticated cigar of the entire issue. These particular Esplendidos didn't come from wooden boxes, but from the handy three-packs made of heavy card-stock paper. Some say that Habanos puts inferior cigars in the smaller packages because the consumer can't inspect them for quality. This test soundly debunks that rumor. There's excellent aging potential for a cigar such as this one, but with a score of 95 points, who can wait?



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2015

COHIBA ESPLENDIDO

Both nuanced and bold, this refined cigar leaves very precise impressions of smoky peanuts, leather and roasted coffee beans on the palate. Sweeter notes of candied citrus and dried fruit balance the savory components. Complex and harmonious.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £42.48

95



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

E.P. CARRILLO MADURO CHURCHILL ESPECIAL

A toasty, oaky smoke that resonates with sweet vanilla-bean notes and a touch of toffee on the finish. It's a dark, oily cigar with even combustion.
U.S.: \$7.70 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS, MEXICO, COLOMBIA
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

7-20-4 CHURCHILL

A pigtailed Churchill cloaked in a very dark wrapper. It's rich and earthy with sweet notes that range from caramel and pecan to molasses. The finish leaves a dry mineral aftertaste.
U.S.: \$8.35 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

ARTURO FUENTE CHURCHILL

Slim and squarely pressed, this Churchill starts with sweet dried berries, gingersnap and cocoa-bean qualities before taking on flinty notes and a vaguely nutty finish.
U.S.: \$6.25 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA GLORIA CUBANA CHURCHILL MADURO

Near-black in appearance, this imposing Churchill has some slight resistance on the draw. Initial notes of leather and earth carry a charry note of burnt toast, wheat and a mineral finish.
U.S.: \$6.59 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN CRISTOBAL REVELATION TRIUMPH

There's an underlying tanginess to this woody, nutty smoke. A touch of light chocolate complements the cedary finish.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

89

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP.
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CAMACHO CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL

Draped in a clean wrapper, this yellowish Churchill starts with a light, straw-and-hay character before building to heavier notes of wheat and graham cracker.
U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A

88**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

CASA MAGNA OSCURO CHURCHILL GORDO

A tightly packed cigar with a firm draw that delivers a leathery, cedary smoke that also smacks of pine and eucalyptus.
U.S.: \$9.02 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF WINSTON CHURCHILL CHURCHILL

Musty and damp, this cigar picks up touches of ginger and wood. The finish is sweet with caramel notes, but the underlying mustiness persists.
U.S.: \$19.10 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DIAMOND CROWN JULIUS CAESER CHURCHILL

There are some soft spots on the body of this cigar, but it smokes evenly. Raw cocoa notes become a bit more refined before a boozy note of bitter herbal liqueur emerges. The finish is minty.
U.S.: \$16.85 U.K.: N/A

88**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS, DOM. REP.
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

HOYO DE MONTERREY EXCALIBUR NO. II

Though floral and herbal at first, this lightly colored Churchill shows some distinct notes of leather and nougat, before a mild, tea-like finish.
U.S.: \$7.89 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: INDONESIA

ROMEO Y JULIETA 1875 CHURCHILL

A grayish Churchill with a dead-even draw and burn. Initial bready, yeasty notes become warm and toasty. Some woody notes emerge as well before the faintly fruity finish.
U.S.: \$7.40 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

MONTECRISTO CLASSIC CHURCHILL

As mild as it looks, this lightly hued Churchill offers a woody, herbal smoke with hints of vanilla and a nutty touch of pecan on the finish.
U.S.: \$13.34 U.K.: N/A

87**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

SAINT LUIS REY CHURCHILL

Though dark, attractive and gleaming with oil, this cigar is muddled and unfocused, with scattered notes of salt and leather turning both sweet and bitter on every other puff. The aftertaste is sour.
U.S.: \$9.40 U.K.: N/A

84

corona gordas

Joya de Nicaragua may not be the trendiest of so-called “boutique” rolling salons found in Nicaragua. But it has a few things that these edgy, hip factories do not—history, experience and a lot of aged tobacco. All three came together almost poetically with the Joya de Nicaragua Black Nocturno, which scored 93 points, the best score in this category. At \$5.95 per cigar it seems priced from a decade ago. Traditionalists will love the 46 ring gauge. That’s not to say you can’t have a great smoke in a thicker size. The Cohiba Nicaragua N54 and Espinosa Habano No. 5 both scored 91 points and both exceed 50 ring gauge. All three cigars showcase fine Nicaraguan tobaccos.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

JOYA DE NICARAGUA BLACK NOCTURNO

This corona gorda leaves precise impressions of black-cherry and cocoa nibs on the palate, which are elevated by notes of leather, nougat and a hint of peppermint.
U.S.: \$5.95 U.K.: N/A

93



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

COHIBA NICARAGUA N54

Notes of white pepper and cumin lead to a bold coffee bean character before the sweet, fruity finish. It's a dark and oily cigar that draws and burns evenly.
U.S.: \$14.99 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: ECUADOR
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ESPINOSA HABANO NO. 5

There's a lush draw to this well-made corona gorda. Sweet notes of brown sugar and molasses are complemented by a salty, mineral finish.
U.S.: \$6.90 U.K.: N/A

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2016

HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE ESPECIAL

An oaky, cedary cigar with a touch of saltiness and fresh tobacco underpinnings. The cedar notes gain intensity, and resound on the finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £22.00

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ILLUSIONE GARAGISTE TORO

The draw and burn of this cigar are even and consistent. Notes of vanilla and oolong tea are balanced by earthy undertones and a maple-pecan sweetness.
U.S.: \$9.85 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

AGING ROOM PELO DE ORO SCHERZO

This dark, veiny cigar wears a pigtail cap. Its easy draw imparts notes of dry woods, dark chocolate and a touch of fruit before a dry finish with a hint of eucalyptus.
U.S.: \$13.90 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CASA CUBA DIVINE INSPIRATION
A slim, softly pressed cigar draped in a pale wrapper. Notes of cinnamon and nutmeg are balanced by hints of nougat, minerals and faint char. The finish is chewy.
U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2015

H. UPMANN CONNOISSEUR A
Two prominent, gnarly veins stretch along the wrapper of this tawny-colored toro, which burns evenly. It's earthy and floral, but also imparts notes of salt with a touch of sweetness and an underlying spice. Medium to full-bodied.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £23.48

89



U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HERRERA ESTELI MIAMI TORO
Earthy, cocoa notes are joined by a sweet-and-nutty raisin bread quality. The finish leaves a chalky aftertaste.
U.S.: \$13.00 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2015

MONTECRISTO DOUBLE EDMUNDO
Covered in gnarly veins, this toro is topped with a very flat head. It's a predominantly nutty smoke with floral and peppery qualities and a woody finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.86

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

PARTAGAS RAMON Y RAMON MAXIM GRANDE
Draped in a veiny wrapper, this corona gorda has a lush, even draw that delivers notes of wood, dry almonds and a touch of spice before an herbal finish.
U.S.: \$7.99 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ROMEO Y JULIETA RESERVE TITAN (TUBO)
Gleaming with oil, the reddish-brown toro begins herbal and spicy before delivering notes of earth and leather. A touch of graham-cracker sweetness precedes the wheat-like finish.
U.S.: \$7.65 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY POST EMBARGO TORO
Streaky, oily and box-pressed, this toro imparts a sweet honey-and-wood quality with touches of toast and nuts, but the flavors disappear rather quickly for a short finish.
U.S.: \$9.10 U.K.: N/A

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF SIGNATURE TORO
A tan toro covered in a pristine wrapper. Initial puffs are grassy with touches of slate and pine needles. Hints of toffee add sweetness before the slightly metallic finish.
U.S.: \$21.50 U.K.: N/A

87

figurados

Any cigar that scores 93 points yet retails for less than \$10 belongs in your humidor. Consider that simple cigar calculus. Now consider the Padrón 6000 Maduro, which scored 93 points and has a suggested retail price of \$8.10. True, Padrón's core line is sometimes overlooked for the fancier 1964 Anniversary Series or the Serie 1926, but Padrón has never been one to punish their loyal customers just because they don't want to spend \$20 on a cigar. In the case of this 93-point Padrón 6000, the reward couldn't have been better. Between its cocoa powder qualities, the warm, toasty undertones and the sprinklings of sweetness, this cigar, structurally speaking, is like any other Padrón—rich and delicious. Made by the Fuentes in the Dominican Republic, the Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Belicoso No. 1 scored 92 points. Its blend of fairly full-bodied Dominican tobaccos is elevated and finessed by the dark Sumatra-seed wrapper grown in Ecuador. As with most Ashton Virgin Sun Grown, the Belicoso has a sultry sheen that foreshadows the smoking experience—sophisticated, interesting and even a bit mysterious.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 6000 MADURO

Deliciously nutty, this slightly pressed torpedo has an underlying toastiness complemented by notes of cocoa powder and a sweet, nougat finish.
U.S.: \$8.10 U.K.: N/A

93



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON VIRGIN SUN GROWN BELICOSO NO. 1

Crafted with a blunted tip, this figurado showcases notes of spicy leather, chocolate-covered raisins and sweet tea. There is a pleasant minerality on the finish.
U.S.: \$11.20 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2016

BOLIVAR BELICOSO FINO

An attractive belicoso that balances clear, profound notes of nuts, graham cracker and salt with hints of chocolate and cedar. A sweet and savory smoke.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £19.58

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

EDMUNDO DANTES CONDE BELICOSO EXCLUSIVO MEXICO

This chocolate-brown belicoso has a bold, zesty character that hints of orange creamsicle, hickory wood and honeyed tea. A pleasant minerality dominates the finish.
U.S.: \$26.50 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

H. UPMANN 1844 RESERVE BELICOSO

The visible pores give the wrapper of this dark belicoso a toothy appearance. It has a cedary sweetness, also showing notes of toasted marshmallow, leather and an earthy finish.
U.S.: \$7.79 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: PERU, DOM. REP., BRAZIL
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

FERNANDO LEÓN FAMILY RESERVE BELICOSO

A sweet and spicy torpedo with notes of mesquite and black pepper underscored by pleasant nuttiness. Spice recurs on the finish.

U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

NEW WORLD ALMIRANTE

As bold as it appears, this dark, box-pressed belicoso delivers a strong, salt-and-pepper quality with hints of cocoa and coffee, that turn a bit acidic.

U.S.: \$6.50 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ROCKY PATEL FIFTY-FIVE ROBUSTO

This oily figurado smokes well, delivering notes of rich woods, roasted coffee and earth. There is a pleasant charriness and a hint of baking spice on the finish.

U.S.: \$10.30 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS, INDONESIA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ALEC BRADLEY TEMPUS MADURO MAGISTRI

A long figurado with a taper at the head and foot. It's a tangy, woody smoke that shows notes of earth and pepper before a mineral finish.

U.S.: \$9.95 U.K.: N/A

88



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2016

CUABA DIVINOS

Covered in an unattractive wrapper, this mini perfecto is fashioned with a flat head and nipple foot. It's an earthy smoke with hints of wood and spice. A simple smoke overall.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £9.92

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

DEBONAIRE MADURO FIRST DEGREE

A bit ruffled in appearance, this little perfecto is full of herbal, floral notes that take on a mineral quality and slate-like finish.

U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 15/16"
FILLER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF,
U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF, HONDURAS
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

CAMACHO AMERICAN BARREL-AGED PERFECTO GORDO

Musty from start to finish, this near-black perfecto also hints at mint and earth. The draw and burn are full and even.

U.S.: \$12.00 U.K.: N/A

86



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PADILLA ANNIVERSARY TORPEDO

First puffs of this pointy belicoso are herbal with juniper-like notes that become dusty and earthy. The finish is dry.

U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A

86

lonsdales

As often as we bemoan the lonsdale's decrease in popularity, we appreciate the companies that still produce these elegant smokes and commend the cigarmakers who make them well. The Romeo y Julieta Reserva Real Lonsdale scored 91 points achieving top marks in the category. This cigar teaches the smoker some important lessons in preconceived notions. By appearances, one might think this is a tepid cigar—it isn't. The wrapper may not be dark, but the cigar is loaded with complex flavors that unfold with each puff. Another thing to remember: large cigar companies can make great cigars. In the case of the Romeo y Julieta, the largest cigar company outscored the smaller producers. However, calling Norteño a small producer would be a misnomer. The Lonsdale scored 90 points. Norteño is a small-production brand made in Nicaragua by Drew Estate's high-volume factory. The Tatuaje Cabinet Havana Cazadores also scored 90 points, and is made in Doral, Florida, at El Rey de Los Habanos. La Flor Dominicana's Cameroon Cabinet No. 1 is an especially unusual smoke—it's a lonsdale and it's wrapped in Cameroon.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROMEO Y JULIETA RESERVA REAL LONSDALE

Deceptively complex for a cigar with such a tan wrapper, this medium-bodied cigar imparts a rich, nutty smoke overlaid with spicy cinnamon, crushed walnuts and a creamy café au lait finish.

U.S.: \$7.27 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

LA FLOR DOMINICANA CAMEROON CABINET NO. 1

The large, visible pores of the wrapper give this lonsdale a rustic, toothy appearance. Initial briny olive notes segue into a sweet-and-sour smoke replete with nuttiness and a spicy cinnamon finish.

U.S.: \$9.70 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

NORTEÑO LONSDALE

A flat cigar with rounded edges, this dark cigar delivers a dense, chewy smoke sweet with caramel vanilla bean and a nutmeg finish.

U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

90



U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6 3/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE CABINET HAVANA CAZADORES

Rolled with a dark-brown wrapper, this long, skinny lonsdale has a substantial draw that imparts a leathery, oaky smoke with a touch of red wine. A balanced cigar.

U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ASHTON AGED MADURO NO. 30

A near-black lonsdale that forms a very white ash. Big initial saffron notes remain on the palate along with spicy cocoa bean and wood. The finish is flinty.

U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

CAO FLATHEAD V642 PISTON

Rolled with an abruptly flat head, this dark cigar has an exemplary draw and perfect burn. The smoke is dense with coffee bean and black pepper yet sweetened with notes of ripe apple and molasses.
U.S.: \$7.19 U.K.: N/A

89**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES SUPERIOR

This pressed lonsdale draws and burns perfectly. It's a bit herbal at first but develops a hickory and mesquite character with a light, vanilla bean finish.
U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

89**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

ROMEO Y JULIETA CAZADORES

A dark, oily, slim cigar with a simple palate of earth, leather and minerals that lead to a tangy finish. Medium to full-bodied with a firm draw.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.13

89**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

DON DIEGO LONSDALE

Tangy puffs of citrus and cedar become earthy with faint traces of nutmeg. A mild to medium-bodied smoke with a muted finish.
U.S.: \$5.14 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

OLIVA CONNECTICUT RESERVE LONSDALE

Herbal and floral, this yellow lonsdale also imparts some grassy notes with consistent nuttiness. The mild, creamy textured smoke finesses the palate.
U.S.: \$6.12 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

THE GRIFFIN'S NO. 200

The bright, lemony citrus notes of this cigar become dry and leafy with a papery quality and a balsa wood finish. A mild cigar.
U.S.: \$11.30 U.K.: N/A

86**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

FONSECA VINTAGE LONSDALE (TUBO)

This lonsdale exhibits a textbook draw and perfect combustion. It's a mild, salty smoke with touches of slate and a chalky finish.
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

85**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

FOUR KICKS SELECCIÓN NO. 5

The woody and citrus notes of this lonsdale eventually warm to a wheaty, salty character, but the finish is dry and acidic.
U.S.: \$7.70 U.K.: N/A

85

panetelas

No other section in this issue turned up as many 90-plus scores as the panetela category. Almost half of the cigars we rated scored 91 points, while 10 out of the 13 cigars here achieved scores of at least 90. Compare that with other categories within our tasting pages and you'll see that's an unusually high percentage of outstanding performers. And notice the prices. With a few exceptions, most hover in the \$10 range, either a bit over or a bit under. It's too early to declare a panetela renaissance, but it's safe to say that there are great slim cigars on the market. Half of the cigars that scored 91 points were made in Nicaragua. Both the L'Atelier and My Father Lanceros are made at the My Father Cigars factory. These particular 601 La Bomba Warhead III cigars were produced at La Zona. Two Dominican panetelas—the Aging Room Bin No. 1 and the La Flor Dominicana Double Ligero—both scored 91 points and were remarkable in their ability to temper strong spiciness with a balancing sweetness. In the case of the La Palina Illumination the inverse was true, as its up-front sweetness is balanced by spice. The cigar is made in the U.S.A.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

601 LA BOMBA WARHEAD III

Slightly pressed with a pigtail cap, this lancero draws beautifully. It's an earthy, nutty smoke balanced by graham cracker and vanilla bean sweetness.
U.S.: \$10.95 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

AGING ROOM BIN NO. 1 D MINOR

A skinny panetela whose draw is full and zesty with spicy, strong first puffs that smack of red and black pepper. Intermediary coffee notes lead to nuttiness and a salted-caramel finish.
U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

L'ATELIER LAT LANCERO

Though the draw is a bit firm, it imparts plenty of earthy, semisweet chocolate notes along with heavy almond elements and a prominent mineral finish.
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA DOUBLE LIGERO LANCERO

Bracingly spicy from the first puff, this strong smoke balances its piquancy with leather and coffee notes, though the finish is sweet with honeyed wood.
U.S.: \$11.20 U.K.: N/A

91



U.S.A.

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA ILLUMINATION LANCERO

An attractive cigar with a three-seam cap. Its lush draw delivers sweet notes of honey and vanilla coupled with spicier touches of freshly ground white pepper.
U.S.: \$11.50 U.K.: N/A

91

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MY FATHER NO. 4 LANCERO

There's a four-seam cap topping this distinct, pigtailed lancero. First puffs are strong and peppery with bold notes of wood and smoked meat. Nutty coffee notes emerge on the finish.
U.S.: \$10.10 U.K.: N/A

91**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

OLIVA SERIE V LANCERO

There's a pleasant balance in this cigar between bright acidity and sweetness. Roasted coffee bean notes and touches of tart green apple develop a ripe fruit and fresh tobacco finish.
U.S.: \$7.14 U.K.: N/A

90**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, COSTA RICA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ROCKY PATEL SUPER LIGERO LANCERO

The substantial draw of this dark lancero saturates the palate with a strong, heavy smoke whose notes of black cherry are punctuated by spicy notes of crushed red and black pepper.
U.S.: \$8.05 U.K.: N/A

90**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

THE TABERNACLE LANCERO

The dark, inky wrapper of this panetela is nearly black. It's rich and hearty with a chocolate-and-vanilla quality enlivened by spicy notes and an oaky finish.
U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A

90**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

TRINIDAD FUNDADORES

Long and slim with a tight draw. The smoke begins light with sweet tea and a bit of gingersnap before chewier notes of molasses and cinnamon emerge.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.98

90**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

LIGA PRIVADA ÚNICO SERIE L-40

Upon first puffs, this dark cigar immediately imparts an earthy smoke with licorice-like notes of anise. Some woody, fruity elements also come through, especially on the finish.
U.S.: \$15.75 U.K.: N/A

89**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA DE NICARAGUA ANTAÑO 1970 LANCERO

A rustic-looking lancero with a matte wrapper and pigtail cap. Its firm draw offers some woody, oaky notes, touches of salted taffy and a bit of roasted coffee bean. The finish is dry and gritty.
U.S.: \$7.84 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

KRISTOFF MADURO LANCERO

A rustic-looking panetela with a pigtail head and uncut foot. Earthy and toasty, the panetela delivers some gritty coffee notes, but airy pockets in the draw cause some bitterness.
U.S.: \$8.80 U.K.: N/A

85

robustos

The ever-popular robusto category continues to deliver exemplary smokes. Three cigars scored 92 points. When the CAO brand was first sold to Henri Wintermans Cigars, and then to General Cigar, fans were afraid that quality would decline. The fear can be put to rest, at least with the CAO Italia Ciao. At 92 points, it's the highest score that the size ever achieved. The Ramon Allones Specially Selected has traditionally been a go-to cigar for smokers of stronger Cuban tobacco. While the Specially Selected wasn't a powerhouse, it was balanced and tasty. The Cuban Trinidad Topes Edición Limitada 2016 is another example of how the thick cigar trend has reached Havana.



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: ITALY, NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

CAO ITALIA CIAO

There's a reddish, colorado-maduro gleam to this dark cigar, whose creamy smoke is lush with fruity, ripe apple notes, molasses and brown sugar. The finish is long and spicy. Tasty and bold.
U.S.: \$6.69 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2016

RAMON ALLONES SPECIALLY SELECTED

Toasty and tangy, this veiny robusto draws and burns evenly, showing the nutty qualities of walnut shell and a sweet nougat finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.00

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

TRINIDAD TOPES EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2016

Crafted with a pigtail cap, this fat robusto has a full draw that delivers rich and woody smoke with hints of black pepper, sweet almond and a touch of earthy spice.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £31.53

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HOYO LA AMISTAD ROBUSTO

Rolled with a toothy wrapper, this cigar has a full, even draw that shows notes of leather, cocoa powder and fruit before a big walnut finish.
U.S.: \$7.59 U.K.: N/A

90



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALADINO ROBUSTO

This tan robusto is wrapped in a matte cover leaf. The draw and burn are notably even. Heavy minerals and flintiness dissipate to show leather and nougat.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

DON PEPIN GARCIA CUBAN CLASSIC 1979

Rolled with a tidy three-seam cap, this cigar burns evenly, forming a solid, stable ash. Initial spiciness becomes sweeter with raisins before a lighter patch of tea notes and zesty cedar. Flavors go back and forth.
U.S.: \$7.40 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

E.P. CARRILLO DUSK ROBUSTO
Besides one large vein, this dark robusto is pristine in appearance. Its ripe tobacco notes start with earth and fruit, develop into molasses and culminate in a mineral finish.
U.S.: \$6.80 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

H. UPMANN MAGNUM 54
This cigar exudes a pleasant, toasty aroma as it burns. Floral, mild intonations segue into strong peanut character with touches of cinnamon, woodiness and a mineral finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £22.52

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

**PDR 1878 CUBANO ESPECIAL
CAPA MADURO ROBUSTO**
Topped with a knotted pigtail-style cap, this dark robusto is a primarily sweet and woody smoke with a toffee note and toasty finish.
U.S.: \$6.11 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

MACANUDO CAFÉ LORDS
Covered in classically light, claro wrapper, this cigar is mild and woody with a citrus character, touches of salt and a sweet note of nougat.
U.S.: \$6.19 U.K.: N/A

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**MONTECRISTO PILOTICO
PEPE MENDEZ ROBUSTO**
Wearing a coarse, rustic colorado wrapper, this robusto shows notes of cumin and leather before a slightly acidic finish that hints of dried fruit.
U.S.: \$15.60 U.K.: N/A

88



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**PERDOMO HABANO BOURBON
BARREL-AGED MADURO ROBUSTO**
This cigar begins with initial notes of earth, coffee beans and spicy cocoa. The smoke turns woody later on, and it loses some depth of flavor.
U.S.: \$7.75 U.K.: N/A

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

**NAT SHERMAN TIMELESS COLLECTION
ROBUSTO**
A medium-bodied, earthy smoke redolent of minerals and cedar. The finish is floral with notes of tea.
U.S.: \$7.95 U.K.: N/A

87



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

VILLIGER SAN'DORO CLARO ROBUSTO
An attractive robusto whose lush draw delivers a creamy smoke spiced up with notes of black pepper, though the finish is notably dry.
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

87

Cigars are listed first by country and then by score. Please refer to the main tasting pages for notes and prices.

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic
95–100
Outstanding
90–94
Very good to excellent
80–89
Average to good
commercial quality
70–79
Don't waste your money
60–69
Not available
n/a
*Note: all prices are
manufacturers' suggested
retail, before taxes.*

CUBA

95	Cohiba Esplendido
92	Ramon Allones Specially Selected
92	Trinidad Topes Edición Limitada 2016
91	Bolivar Belicoso Fino
91	Edmundo Dantes Conde Belicoso Exclusivo Mexico
90	Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure Especial
90	Trinidad Fundadores
89	H. Upmann Connossieur A
89	H. Upmann Magnum 54
89	Montecristo Double Edmundo
89	Romeo y Julieta Cazadores
87	Cuaba Divinos

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

92	Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Belicoso No. 1
91	Aging Room Bin No. 1 D Minor
91	E.P. Carrillo Maduro Churchill Especial
91	La Flor Dominicana Double Ligero Lancero
91	Romeo y Julieta Reserva Real Lonsdale
90	H. Upmann 1844 Reserve Belicoso
90	La Flor Dominicana Cameroon Cabinet No. 1
89	Arturo Fuente Churchill
89	Ashton Aged Maduro No. 30
89	Casa Cuba Divine Inspiration
89	E.P. Carrillo Dusk Robusto
89	Fernando León Family Reserve Belicoso
89	La Gloria Cubana Churchill Maduro
89	Partagas Ramon y Ramon Maxim Grande
89	PDR 1878 Cubano Especial Capa Maduro Robusto
88	Davidoff Winston Churchill Churchill
88	Diamond Crown Julius Caesar Churchill
88	Don Diego Lonsdale
88	Macanudo Café Lords
88	Montecristo Pilotico Pepe Mendez Robusto
88	Romeo y Julieta 1875 Churchill
87	Davidoff Signature Toro
87	Debonaire Maduro First Degree
87	Montecristo Classic Churchill
87	Nat Sherman Timeless Collection Robusto
86	Camacho American Barrel-Aged Perfecto Gordo
86	The Griffin's No. 200
85	Fonseca Vintage Lonsdale (Tubo)
85	Four Kicks Selección No. 5
85	Kristoff Maduro Lancero

HONDURAS

92	CAO Italia Ciao
90	Rocky Patel Super Ligero Lancero
89	7-20-4 Churchill
89	Aladino Robusto
89	Romeo y Julieta Reserve Titan (Tubo)
88	Alec Bradley Post Embargo Toro
88	Alec Bradley Tempus Maduro Magistri
88	Camacho Connecticut Churchill
88	Casa Magna Oscuro Churchill Gordo
88	Hoyo de Monterrey Excalibur No. II
86	Padilla Anniversary Torpedo
84	Saint Luis Rey Churchill

NICARAGUA

93	Joya de Nicaragua Black Nocturno
93	Padrón 6000 Maduro
91	601 La Bomba Warhead III
91	Cohiba Nicaragua N54
91	Espinosa Habano No. 5
91	L'Atelier LAT Lancero
91	My Father No. 4 Lancero
90	Hoyo La Amistad Robusto
90	Illusione Garagiste Toro
90	Norteño Lonsdale
90	Oliva Serie V Lancero
90	The Tabernacle Lancero
89	Aging Room Pelo de Oro Scherzo
89	CAO Flathead V642 Piston
89	Don Pepin Garcia Cuban Classic 1979
89	Liga Privada Único Serie L-40
89	New World Almirante
89	Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Superior
89	Rocky Patel Fifty-Five Robusto
89	San Cristobal Revelation Triumph
88	Joya de Nicaragua Antaño 1970 Lancero
88	Oliva Connecticut Reserve Lonsdale
88	Perdomo Habano Bourbon Barrel-Aged Maduro Robusto
87	Villiger San'Doro Claro Robusto

U.S.A.

91	La Palina Illumination Lancero
90	Tatuaje Cabinet Havana Cazadores
89	Herrera Esteli Miami Toro

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connoisseur's corner

In 1959, a box of diminutive Montecristo No. 4 cigars left Havana, bound for the short journey to the United States. When the cigars were rolled at the factory owned by Alonso Menendez and Pepe Garcia, they were one of many, with little to set them apart. But one year later, the factory was nationalized by Fidel Castro, and in 1961 President John F. Kennedy signed an embargo banning the cigars and other Cuban goods from U.S. soil. Today, that box of cigars has aged into masterful smokes, petit coronas with a sweet, spicy character that scored 98 points in this special tasting. The little Monty was one of two smokes to achieve “classic” status on our 100-point scale, joining a much larger and far younger Punch Churchill presented in a tube.



MONTECRISTO NO. 4 (1959)

A pale brown wrapper covers this little cigar, which was rolled by the Menendez y Garcia family in Cuba and has been aging in a humidor for 58 years. It's elegant and quite mild, with an earthy quality to the smoke as well as a prominent note of cinnamon. Delicious. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

98



PUNCH CHURCHILL (2002)

This beautiful cigar, preserved in a tube, has a superb draw and burn. It begins with notes of cocoa powder and pencil shavings, then develops some leather and Middle Eastern spices, and grows bolder and more opulent as it burns. Notes of dark chocolate emerge on the finish, which is long and luxurious. A wonderful smoke that is far from its peak. —*David Savona*

95



HOYO DE MONTERREY CHURCHILL (2008)

This lovely cigar is no longer made, which is a shame, for it's pleasant and easygoing. The first taste is of slivered almonds, vanilla and plenty of cedar, with a touch of cinnamon. It's a delicate, elegant smoke, with a fine draw and dead-even burn. It grows slightly more intense in the second half, but it's not a strong cigar, mild to medium in body. An ideal breakfast smoke. —*David Savona*

94



LA GLORIA CUBANA TORPEDO NO. 1 (1993)

The yellowed cellophane of this cigar speaks to its age. These were made in Miami by Ernesto Perez-Carrillo just after the world discovered his brand in the pages of this magazine. Plenty of oils seep through the supple wrapper, and there's still lots of life to this smoke. It starts with sharp, woody notes that segue into black pepper before settling into a sweet, nutty smoke redolent of almond paste and marzipan. —*Gregory Mottola*

94



RAMON ALLONES SELECTION DE LUXE NO. 2 (CIRCA 1950)

A small figurado with a dark-brown wrapper. The draw has some resistance, and the taste is tart, showing its considerable age. But it's still alive, with plenty of flavor left to enjoy, especially given its age of more than 60 years. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

94



PUNCH PUNCH (2006)

This box-pressed corona gorda comes from the brief period when the gold details on Cuban Punch bands were printed with flat dyes rather than metallic finishes. There's some slight resistance to the draw, but it's open enough to let through a satisfying amount of toasty, chewy smoke with sweet and nutty elements and a flowery finish. —*Gregory Mottola*

93

For my humidor,
I use Boveda.

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ANDALUSIAN BULL
2016 CIGAR OF THE YEAR
CIGAR AFICIONADO



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Padrón Serie 1926 No. 90 Naturals (box, left) and E.P. Carrillo Selección Oscuro Piramides Royals (box, right) were among the highest-scoring cigars of 2016.

Cigars by the Numbers

A detailed analysis of the cigars we rated in 2016, including the best (and worst) sizes, countries of origin and more

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA • DATA COMPILED BY DAVID CLOUGH

Arguing taste is usually a pointless exercise. Making your case with numbers, on the other hand, can be far more convincing. With that in mind, we at CIGAR AFICIONADO took a long, hard look at our numbers from 2016 to answer major questions concerning the premium cigar industry: which countries delivered the best cigars of 2016? What sizes outperformed the others? Who gave the best value for your dollar? We were as curious about the answer as you, and to get to the root of the issue we stripped away the subjective elements to bring you some objective answers—and we have both the qualitative and quantitative data to support it. The answer is in the scores.

And there were a considerable number of scores, 665 of them, all the cigars we rated in 2016 in the pages of CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine and *Cigar Insider*, our twice-monthly, ratings-based newsletter. A year's

worth of scores is a large brick of information to digest. That's why we've broken down the data.

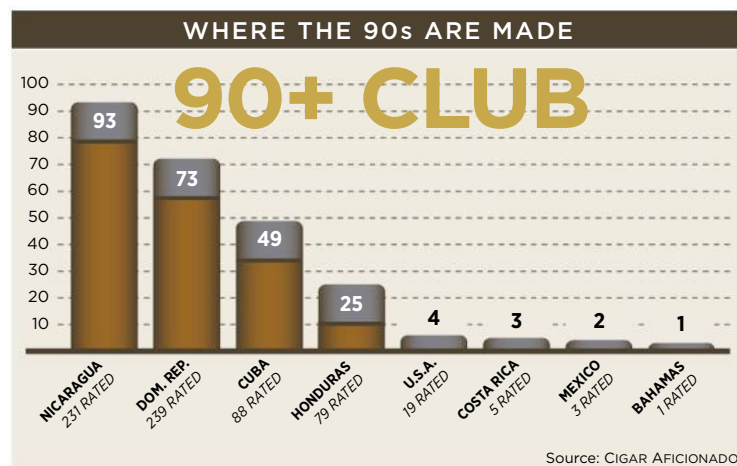
High scores are, of course, a reflection of high quality, but raw numbers alone aren't as meaningful without context or perspective. To offer a comprehensive evaluation of the premium cigar industry, we presented the results in a few different ways: By brand, by country and by size. We also looked at prices. Which country produced the most expensive cigars? And do the most expensive necessarily have the highest scores? The answer is in the info.

All the cigars we rate undergo a thorough blind tasting process. In our view, tasting cigars blind is the most honest, accurate and impartial method for evaluating a cigar. By "blind," we don't mean that we smoke cigars blindfolded. A full-time tasting coordinator goes out into the market and purchases cigars from high-end, reputable brick-and-mortar



tobacconists. He then removes the identifying cigar bands and replaces them with generic numbered labels. These coded cigars are passed out to our panel of tasters. (And the coordinator is not a member of the panel, to avoid the possibility of him recognizing a cigar he coded.) When the band is removed the taster has no choice but to review the cigar at face value. Any preconceived notions that are often associated with a brand name—good or bad—are gone. All that's left is the cigar and its taster. Scores are based on performance and quality: appearance, draw, combustion, complexity and harmony.

As it turns out, 2016 was more than just a pretty good year. Of the 665 cigars we rated, 250 (or 38 percent) scored 90 points or higher on our 100-point scale. That means that a cigar smoker walking into the local brick-and-mortar shop has a good chance of finding a cigar that isn't merely decent, but outstanding.



Within the 90-plus-category of cigars lies an even more exclusive, elite grouping. Of the 250 cigars that scored 90 points or higher, 61 scored at least 92 points, but only 22 cigars scored 93 points or higher. These 22 smokes are the crown jewels of our yearly tastings. Nicaragua makes eight (36.4 percent) of the cigars within this coveted bracket, Cuba makes seven (31.8 percent) and four (18.2 percent) are from the Dominican Republic. Mexico, Honduras and the U.S. had one apiece.

Only six cigars scored 94 points, and these were the highest-rated cigars that the magazine smoked in 2016, many of which went on to make it onto our Top 25 Cigars of 2016. (Note that cigars on the Top 25 list were rated via a separate tasting, and the Top 25 scores were not factored into this year-end report.)

Of the six cigars to score 94 points, two were Cuban—the Romeo y Julieta Belicoso and the Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2. The Romeo y Julieta Belicoso is one of the more obscure Cuban cigars, and is frequently forgotten in favor of Romeo's Churchill series (Churchill, Wide Churchill, Short Churchill, Petit Churchill). The Belicoso outscored them all. Seeing how the Belicoso is becoming a forgotten size in the Habanos portfolio in lieu of new releases, there's a chance it could be discontinued in the near future.

The Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 is in no foreseeable danger of deletion. It's a classic staple in the Habanos portfolio, and one of CIGAR AFICIONADO's Star Cigars of Cuba. It placed No. 9 in CIGAR AFICIONADO's Top 25, so it is not only excellent, but consistently so—and Cuba produces plenty of them.

The top score bracket of 2016 was dominated by Nicaraguan cigars. Two Padróns and one Oliva. This comes as no surprise. Padróns usually excel in our blind tastings, and the Oliva Serie V Melanio has collected many accolades from this magazine since it was released. Both have been former Cigars of the Year. The Casa Turrent Serie 1901, on the other hand, has broken new ground. It's the first Mexican cigar to ever score 94 points in this magazine.

When we look at the scores on a country-by-country basis, the cigars from Cuba truly stood out. We rated 88 Cuban cigars last year, and 49 of them—an impressive 56 percent—scored 90 points or higher. This is more than a positive statistic. Amid poor crops and a recent shortage of tobacco, Cuba's cigar industry still managed to produce no shortage of high-scoring smokes. While this sample of 88 Cuban cigars included a few special releases like Edición Limitadas and Regional Editions, the majority were regular-production smokes such as Hoyo de Monterrey Epicures or Partagás cigars from the letter series.

The average rating for a Cuban cigar in 2016 was 89.8 points, making it the country with the top relevant average. Though Mexico and the Bahamas have higher average scores of 91 and 90, too few of the cigars were smoked to consider those numbers statistically relevant. In 2016, CIGAR AFICIONADO only rated three Mexican cigars and only one from the Bahamas. Costa Rica was close behind with an average score of 89.4, but only five cigars were rated, so again, it isn't very telling of the

country's capability on the whole. For all meaningful purposes, Cuba produced the highest average score of any country.

Nicaragua is a different story. We rated 231 Nicaraguan-made cigars in 2016, and they scored an average of 88.97 points with 40.3 percent scoring 90 points or higher. The number is not quite as high as Cuba's, but once you consider the high volume of Nicaraguan cigars scored last year, the average score becomes more impressive.

Nicaragua has grown into one of the largest producers of premium cigars for the United States, in terms of both volume and quality. Most of the country's cigar-manufacturing takes place in the city of Estelí, now a boomtown thanks to the growing demand for premium cigars. And, despite the rapid growth, Nicaraguan cigars show no sign of deteriorating in quality. They performed quite well in CIGAR AFICIONADO's Top 25 of 2016, occupying nearly half the list with 12 spots, including the No. 2 Cigar of the Year, the Rocky Patel Sun Grown Maduro Robusto.

Only slightly behind by fractions of a point were cigars from Honduras and the Dominican Republic. The 79 Honduran cigars we rated scored an average of 88.57 points while the 231 Dominican cigars averaged 88.38 points—a marginal overall difference. As far as the 90s go, Honduras had 31.6 percent of its cigars rate in the 90s, and the Dominican Republic had 30.5 percent. Averages were similar, but the difference in volume of cigars rated between Honduras and the Dominican Republic was quite large, 79 to 239, respectively.

It's more telling to compare Nicaragua to the Dominican Republic. Both are vying to be the No. 1 exporter of premium cigars to the U.S. and we rated a comparable amount of smokes throughout the year (231 Nicaraguans to 239 Dominicans). Nicaragua came out ahead by less than a point. In other words: very close. And this neck-and-neck outcome is also reflected in terms of units. Each year, Nicaragua comes closer and closer to matching the Dominican Republic's export numbers to the U.S.

Only six cigars scored 94 points, and these were the highest-rated cigars that the magazine smoked in 2016.

Regardless of the close rivalry between Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, all countries (excluding Mexico and The Bahamas on account of the small sample) fell within two points of each other. This is very good news for the consumer. It indicates that the premium market in general is not only delivering high quality overall, but that the playing field remains quite level.

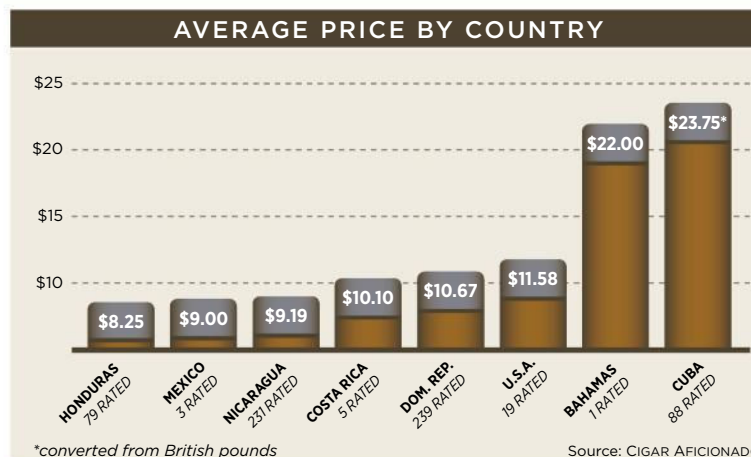
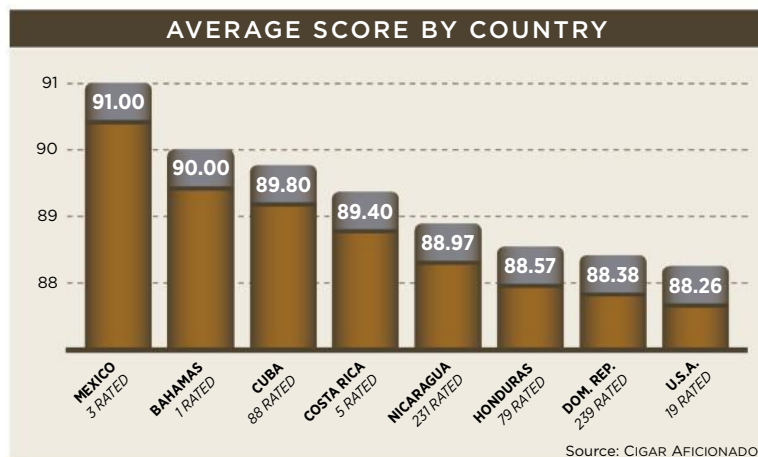
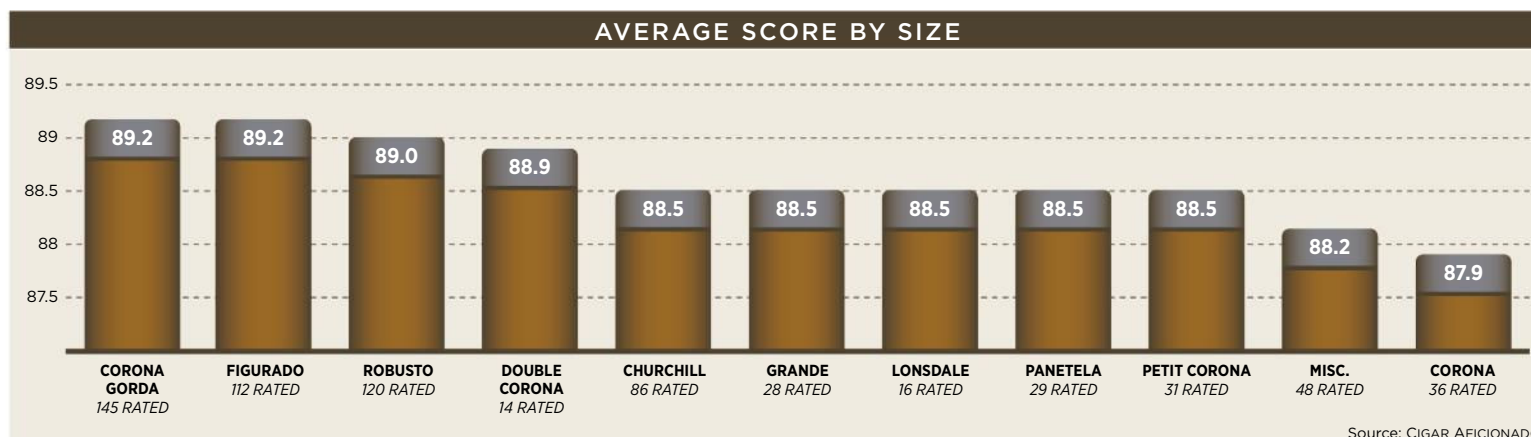
We rated 19 cigars that were rolled in the United States, and they fared worse than any other country, by average, scoring 88.26 points.

Turning to cigar sizes, the cigars that scored the best in 2016 were corona gordas, sometimes referred to as toros. These cigars are the true middle-ground of the size chart—not the shortest, not the longest, not the fattest and not the thinnest. We rated 145 corona gordas (21.8 percent of the year's total) and they had an average score of 89.2 points. The cigars are not only superb in quality, but consumer favorites. Our annual poll of retail tobacconists conducted by *Cigar Insider* newsletter consistently ranks toros as one of the top-selling sizes in cigar shops.

TOP SCORES OF 2016

94	Casa Turrent Serie 1901 Robusto	Mexico
94	Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2	Cuba
94	Oliva Serie V Melanio Robusto	Nicaragua
94	Padrón 50th Anniversary Limited Edition Natural	Nicaragua
94	Padrón Serie 1926 No. 90 Natural	Nicaragua
94	Romeo y Julieta Belicoso	Cuba
93	Alec Bradley Coyolet Petit Lancero	Honduras
93	Ashton Symmetry Prestige	Dom. Rep.
93	Bolívar Corona Gigante	Cuba
93	Casa Fernandez Miami Aganorsa Leaf Maduro Robusto Extra	U.S.A.
93	E.P. Carrillo Selección Oscuro Piramides Royal	Dom. Rep.
93	El Centurion H-2K-CT Toro Box Pressed	Nicaragua
93	Fuente Fuente OpusX Lost City Piramide	Dom. Rep.
93	Joya de Nicaragua Black Nocturno	Nicaragua
93	La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bull	Dom. Rep.
93	Montecristo Open Master	Cuba
93	Norteño Robusto Grande	Nicaragua
93	Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Hermoso Maduro	Nicaragua
93	Padrón 50th Anniversary Limited Edition Maduro	Nicaragua
93	Partagás Serie E No. 2	Cuba
93	Por Larrañaga Picadores	Cuba
93	Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill	Cuba
92	Arturo Fuente Rosado Sungrown Magnum R Vitola "Fifty-Eight"	Dom. Rep.
92	Arturo Fuente Rosado Sungrown Magnum R Vitola "Forty-Four"	Dom. Rep.
92	Ashton Heritage Puro Sol Churchill	Dom. Rep.
92	Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Belicoso No. 1	Dom. Rep.
92	CAO Colombia Bogota	Nicaragua
92	Cohiba Esplendido	Cuba
92	Cohiba Siglo VI (Tubo)	Cuba
92	CroMagnon Anthropology	Nicaragua
92	Daniel Marshall Red Label Torpedo Box-Aged 1 Year	Nicaragua
92	Davidoff Winston Churchill Petit Corona	Dom. Rep.
92	Don Pepin Garcia Cuban Classic 1970	Nicaragua
92	E.P. Carrillo New Wave Reserva Belicoso d'Oro	Dom. Rep.
92	E.P. Carrillo Short Run 2016 Super Robusto	Dom. Rep.
92	El Centurion H-2K-CT Corona Box Pressed	Nicaragua
92	Enclave Churchill	Nicaragua
92	Espinosa Habano No. 4	Nicaragua
92	Fuente Fuente OpusX Double Corona	Dom. Rep.
92	Henry Clay Tattoo Toro	Dom. Rep.
92	Illusione mk	Nicaragua
92	Illusione Fume d'Amour Juniperos	Nicaragua
92	Illusione Ultra Op. No. 4	Nicaragua
92	Joya de Nicaragua Black Toro	Nicaragua
92	La Aurora 107 Maduro Belicoso	Dom. Rep.
92	La Gloria Cubana Revolution Exclusivo Asia Pacifico	Cuba
92	La Palina Red Label Toro	Dom. Rep.
92	Laranja Reserva Caixa	Nicaragua
92	Las Calaveras Edición Limitada 2016 LC50	Nicaragua
92	MBombay Classic Perfecto	Costa Rica
92	Montecristo No. 2	Cuba
92	My Father No. 2 Belicoso	Nicaragua
92	Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35 Natural	Nicaragua
92	Partagás Serie P No. 2	Cuba
92	Psyko Seven Corona	Dom. Rep.
92	Punch Petit Coronation (Tubo)	Cuba
92	Rocky Patel Sun Grown Maduro Robusto	Nicaragua
92	Romeo y Julieta Cedros de Luxe	Cuba
92	Romeo y Julieta Churchill	Cuba
92	Romeo y Julieta Pirámides Añejados	Cuba
92	Tierra Volcan Corto	Nicaragua

Source: CIGAR AFICIONADO



Figurados also scored quite well. These shapely cigars tied with corona gordas for top score by average. The size category encompasses any cigar with tapered ends, torpedo tops, pointed heads, bulbous feet or contoured shapes of any kind. We tested 112 figurados last year. They're difficult to produce, require more time and could be intimidating to a casual smoker, but cigarmakers are still including figurados in their portfolios, and obviously producing them with plenty of high-quality tobacco.

Most notable among figurados was the La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bull, a double tapered salomon with striking contours that could be regarded with fear or awe, depending on your outlook. Either way, most connoisseurs have no choice but to respect it. Look at the Andalusian Bull's résumé: The form requires unusual rolling skill to create; the cigar scored 93 points when first reviewed in *Cigar Insider*; and the smoke went on to become CIGAR AFICIONADO's No. 1 cigar of 2016 at 96 points in the special Top 25 tasting.

If you're not sold on salomones and are a die-hard robusto guy, this shorter, simpler format continues to be a very strong category. At only 2/10 of a point behind corona gordas and figurados, robustos ended up with an average of 89 points over 120 cigars. The appeal of short, squat cigars like robustos lies in their ability to deliver large volumes of smoke in short periods of time.

We rated few double coronas last year, as it's one of a few dying size categories and difficult to find in the market. Unlike robustos, double coronas require a much longer commitment, but the 14 we rated had an average of 88.9 points.

Five sizes scored 88.5 points: Churchills, grandes, lonsdales, panetelas and petit coronas. Of this five-way tie, the Churchill category was the

most impressive due to the 86 cigars—far more than the other three categories. Grandes are a fairly new size. CIGAR AFICIONADO gave this format its own tasting section back in 2012 when the trend started to pick up and it was clear that enormously thick ring gauges were going to be part of the cigar retail portfolio. Grandes are defined as any cigar rolled with a 60 ring gauge or fatter. With an average of 88.5 points, cigarmakers are clearly putting good tobacco in their grande sizes and taking fat cigars seriously. CIGAR AFICIONADO rated more robustos and corona gordas this year than any other cigar.

The size perhaps to avoid? Coronas. These somewhat short and downright slim smokes (the Cuban standard is 5 5/8 inches long by 42 ring gauge) scored an average 87.9 points.

Do you have to spend a lot to get a great cigar? Not at all. Cubans, turned out to be the most expensive smokes of 2016, and by no small margin. Our tasting of 88 Cuban cigars produced an average price of £19.04 (about \$23.75) judging from prices on the U.K. market. Buying American might be patriotic, but American labor doesn't come cheap. Cigars made in the U.S. have an average suggested retail price of \$11.58 per cigar. Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic are a little gentler on the wallet, averaging \$9.19 and \$10.67 per cigar, respectively. Honduras comes in at the least expensive at \$8.25 per smoke.

Judging by the numbers of 2016, the news is quite positive: you don't have to pay a lot for a great cigar. You can get a great cigar from any country, and you don't need to carry out a worldwide search to obtain them, as great cigars are, for the most part, widely available. No single country has the monopoly on high-quality smokes. Smokers are entitled to their preferences, but, statistically speaking, there is no justifiable reason to be a snob. ❖

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FEATURED CIGAR

ASHTON SYMMETRY
BELICOSO

DOM. REP. • PRICE: \$12.25 • BODY: MEDIUM TO FULL

For a full tasting, see page two.

93
POINTS

BEST CIGARS THIS ISSUE

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Espinosa Habano No. 4	Nicaragua	92
Montecristo No. 2	Cuba	92
Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35 Maduro	Nicaragua	92
Romeo y Julieta Churchill	Cuba	92



TOP 25 CIGARS OF 2016

THE BEST CIGARS OF THE YEAR will be showcased in the February issue of *Cigar Aficionado* along with the top-rated Best Buys and most exciting New Releases of 2016. But don't forget the regular tasting section, where we also rated 83 cigars. For a preview of the issue's top-scoring smokes, turn to page two.



FIDEL CASTRO: 1926–2016

THE ASHES OF CUBA'S FORMER PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO were interred on Sunday in a tomb that reads "Fidel" on a plaque. He died on November 25 and was cremated before his ashes were brought to Santiago de Cuba, 540 miles southeast of Havana and the birthplace of Castro's Revolution. He ruled Cuba for decades after overthrowing the previous Batista regime in 1959 and has been widely regarded as a controversial figure ever since. Many mourned Castro's death as the passing of a benevolent leader. A few hundred miles away in Miami, others saw him as an oppressive dictator and celebrated his death in the streets. Turn to page five for the obituary.

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CIGAR WATCH

FROM THE EDITORS OF CIGAR AFICIONADO

SEPT. 27, 2016 | SIGN UP



COHIBA
MACASSAR

FEATURED CIGAR

Punch Gran Puro Santa
Rita (91 Points)

The Punch Gran Puro line came onto the scene in 2003 as General Cigar's only Honduran puro, meaning that it uses only tobacco from Honduras. The Santa Rita size (4 1/2 inches by 52 ring gauge, \$5.29) recently impressed our tasting panel with notes of cashew, hints of fresh coconut and a toasty finish, earning a score of 91 points in August's *Cigar Aficionado*.

Click For More Punch Gran Puro Ratings



11 Cigars You Should Be Smoking Right Now

Cigar Aficionado's 133rd blind tasting, which appeared in our August 2016 issue, is now live on our website. Of the 82 cigars rated by our panel of editors, 11 non-Cuban cigars scored 91 points or higher. These cigars are considered outstanding on our 100-point scale. So if you're heading to your local brick-and-mortar, here are a few cigars that are sure to please right now.

Read Full Story

La Palina Launches Value-Priced Goldie

La Palina Cigars has shipped a modified version of its popular Goldie blend called Illumination. The cigar features the same component tobaccos as Goldie minus the rare and expensive medio tiempo leaf that's nestled inside the limited-edition line of Goldie cigars.

Read Full Story

La Palina Cigar Ratings

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Behind the Cuban Mystique

An extensive infrastructure of scientists, growers, rollers and tasters oversees tobacco from fields to consumers' hands BY GORDON MOTT

Cuban cigars evoke vivid images. Upon lighting a Partagás Lusitania, a Montecristo No. 2, a Cohiba Esplendido or something more obscure, one might imagine waving fields of green tobacco, hear the click-clack of *chavetas* in a rolling factory or have visions of a Havana nightclub. Few, however, will think of a panel of specially chosen tasters evaluating and discussing cigars in a conference room.

That decidedly unromantic picture is nevertheless a vital part of the process that leads to the creation of new Cuban cigar expressions and ensures continuity of flavor in your favorite brands. Behind the legendary cigars of the Caribbean's largest island is Habanos S.A., the monopoly that oversees the process from seed to store shelf.

"We sit around the room, all 25 to 30 of us, talking and discussing whether or not the cigar is producing the tastes that we have been asked to create by Habanos," says Amaury Borges, trying to explain how new brands are created in Cuba. "It's a very interesting process because everyone is used to smoking particular cigars, often from the factories where they work," he adds, "but when we are together we have to use criteria established for all Cuban cigars."

Borges, one of Cuba's leading tobacco scientists at the Instituto de Investigaciones del Tabaco (Tobacco Research Institute), explains that the institute has detailed records, with some information dating back to before the Cuban revolution, of the physical and chemical composition of tobacco grown on every principal farm in Cuba. "We know the sensory qualities of tobacco grown in every specific location in the country," he says.

As a result, when the marketing department at Habanos comes up with a proposed brand, and outlines the tastes and flavors they want in the cigar, the institute has a good idea of where they need to go to find tobacco for that type of cigar profile. Next comes a rigorous and long process of testing different blends, tasting them, making sure the blend is right for each vitola, or size, being created for the new brand. Then, for the final test, the best rollers in the factory where it will be produced are chosen to create a test batch for the panel.

But Borges' and the institute's role in the creation of Cuba's famous cigar brands goes beyond knowing where the best tobacco is grown in the country and testing cigars. They are part of a large apparatus that determines everything from the seeds authorized for each tobacco-growing season, to taking part in the taste tests for the final product, including the top export brands. The process carefully determines if exacting standards are being maintained for "tabaco negro" or the black tobacco that serves as the foundation for Cuban cigars.

Getting Borges to talk about how Cuban cigars are created stems from a simple, straightforward question: Does Cuba try to maintain a specific flavor profile for each of the country's major export brands?



Cuba's Tobacco Research Institute, known as Instituto de Investigaciones del Tabaco, controls the seeds used by the farmers and conducts research to improve seed strains via natural methods of crossing and selection.

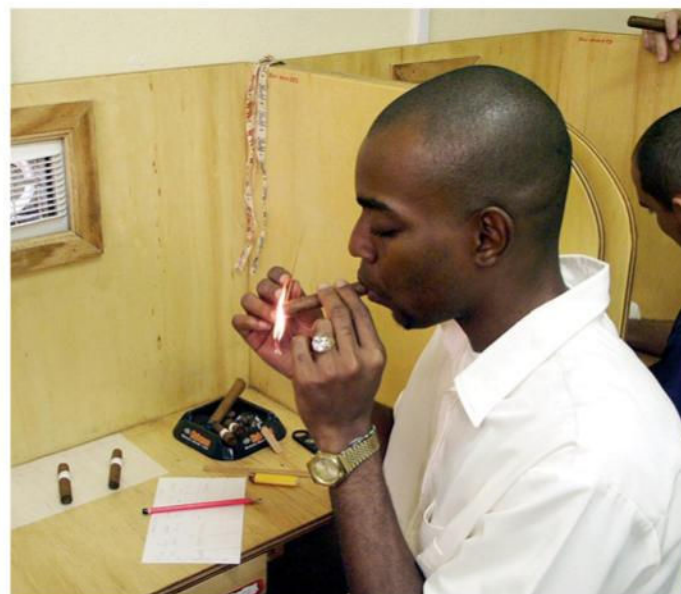
In the past, seasoned smokers claimed they could tell a Montecristo from a Partagás, or an H. Upmann from a Romeo y Julieta. They assigned the major Cuban brands distinct characteristics: Hoyo de Monterrey was a medium-to-light blend with some herbal notes; Montecristo had a core of coffee and spice; H. Upmann was a lot like Montecristo (perhaps with less power but more finesse); Romeo y Julieta produced a medium-bodied cigar, with cocoa-bean flavors in its benchmark Churchill; and Partagás (especially in the Serie D No. 4 and Lusitania sizes) presented power and spice with long, earthy finishes. Other brands, such as Bolívar and Ramon Allones were often called out as very powerful cigars.

But today, many smokers think those distinctions have been lost, and Cuba's tobacco monopoly, Habanos S.A. has homogenized all the brands toward a common flavor profile.

Borges doesn't know how or why that perception exists today. "We are trying to perfect the selection process of tobacco for each brand," says Borges. "We try, and have always tried, to keep track of the farms that have traditionally supplied tobacco to each brand. We do select tobaccos specifically for each brand. We have a standard of quality that is always sought, of course with variations season to season." As diplomatically as possible, he says, "if a person doesn't have a scientific or objective basis for their perception, I'm not sure there is any reason to believe them."

Using the example of Cohiba, Cuba's most prestigious brand, Borges says that the tobacco for Cohiba's filler blends comes from a very specific region and certain farms, and provides continuity in the production and taste of that brand. "It is the same for other brands too," Borges says.

“It may have great characteristics, like yield or resistance to disease so we may fall in love with it in the field, but if it doesn’t have the sensory characteristics of Cuban tobacco, it won’t get approved.”



A cigar roller (left) arranges tobacco leaves in precise order. To assure quality, a taster, or *catador* (right), tests the blend for draw, burn, aroma and flavor.

To ensure that continuity, he explains that samples of every brand from every factory’s production are sent to the National Commission For Tasting, a panel made up of a few dozen tasters, all skilled tobacco industry officials and experienced smokers of Cuban cigars. The commission also includes the top tasters from each factory’s tasting panel, usually made up of 10 to 15 persons, according to Borges. The tasters on those factory panels are constantly evaluated, and the best are sent to the national commission. The tasters gather once a month to taste together, discussing and debating the characteristics of each cigar. Sometimes the cigar is a new brand but more often it is a review of each major brand from each factory’s production. Borges says the panel also judges any new tobacco seed variety that is being developed for commercial use.

One reason for the charge that Cuban brands are becoming homogenized may spring from the fact that since nationalization of the cigar industry in the early 1960s brands are not necessarily made in one factory, but production may be spread across a few facilities.

However, one independent taster, who asked to remain anonymous, is adamant that Cuba’s big brands have identifiable flavor profiles. “When you smoke them side by side, you see that Habanos is still preserving the taste of each brand,” the taster says. And, reporters visiting factories also have seen bales labeled with the names of specific farms and regions, supporting Borges’ contention that factories receive specific leaves for the cigar brands that are rolled in that factory.

The institute’s work begins long before the taste tests, with the choice of seed varieties that will be used in each planting season, and for each region where cigar tobacco is grown. Borges says that the current seeds being planted are derived from a core of four seeds, what he called the industry’s “battle horses”: Havana ’92 and Havana 2000 (the first hybrids developed for use in 1992 to fight blue mold outbreaks in Cuba), and then the subsequent hybrids, Criollo ’98 and Corojo ’99. According to one of Borges’ retired colleagues, Eumelio Espino, some subsequent hybrids have been based on those four seed types. But Borges declines to identify the

new hybrid approved for the 2016-17 season or the seed it had been derived from. Nor will he describe any specific seeds from previous years.

“What I can tell you is that we have studied which seeds do best in which parts of the country, based on the climate and soil factors, and for which type of cigar leaf we are trying to produce, filler or wrapper,” Borges says. He adds that the institute has direct contact with tobacco growers through an extensive network of the institute’s agricultural extension offices spread throughout the tobacco growing regions. “We also discuss with the grower what he needs so that he is comfortable with the seeds he is going to be asked to use.”

Borges compares the study of which seeds to use in which areas to the genetic studies that produce new seeds. Since Cuba only uses traditional methods of hybridization and cross-pollination, it can take 10 to 12 years to create a new seed variety. But there is an additional two years of testing the seed in the fields around the country. The aim is to identify which seeds produce the best yield and taste in each region. Then, the national commission, or the “inquisition panel” as it is called, judges whether a seed meets the criteria for Cuban black tobacco. Borges says, “It may have great characteristics, like yield or resistance to disease so we may fall in love with it in the field, but if it doesn’t have the sensory characteristics of Cuban tobacco, it won’t get approved.”

Borges says one of the current focuses of the Tobacco Research Institute is to create male sterile varieties of the major hybrids being planted in Cuba. “You can see what advantage that would have for us because there would be no seeds produced by people who are not authorized to have seeds. So, it would be easier to keep the strain of tobacco only here in Cuba,” he says.

While he might be secretive about many specifics of his job, Cuba’s top tobacco scientist is forthcoming about his favorite cigar: a Montecristo No. 4. He says that he doesn’t really like the current trend to bigger, fatter ring gauge cigars. He also says it is always a good idea to age cigars. The institute’s studies, he says, have shown that cigars reach their first optimal stage for smoking, when the flavors have all blended together and the cigar acquires a “rounder” taste, after five to eight years. ❖

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Luke Donald, CIGAR AFICIONADO Editor & Publisher Marvin R. Shanken, Bret Baier, Rocky Patel and Bill Terlato in the humidor at Burn in Naples, Florida.



Friends Noelle Medugno, Adrienne Towle, Michelle Ciano and Daniella Cicolini enjoy a couple of premium cigars at a wedding in Gloucester, Massachusetts.



Joaquin Saladrigas, Ryan Leeds, cigarmaker Pepin Garcia, Tony Guerra, Gardner Blandon and Fiorella Blanco enjoy Zafra Rum and My Father cigars in Miami, Florida.



The DiBiase family poses alongside cigarmakers Jorge and José Orlando Padrón during a trip to the Padrón Cigars headquarters in Miami, Florida.



Stephanie Pantano and Stacy Matz of Omaha, Nebraska, take a break from fishing to relax with a Macanudo cigar during a 2015 trip to Ontario, Canada.



Bride and groom Patti and Tony Monte Ferario savor a picturesque moment with friends, family and premium cigars at their wedding in Tavernier, Florida.



Charles Jose from San Francisco, California, pays a visit to the Hotel Nacional in Havana, Cuba, where he samples the local fare alongside a Cuban cigar roller.



Louis Sciarretta, CIGAR AFICIONADO's David Savona and Tesh Durvasula light up My Father cigars after a round at The Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter, Florida.



Curtis Vann and Howard Garrison celebrate 38 years of friendship by enjoying a couple of premium cigars on a beautiful day in Orange Beach, Alabama.



Newlyweds Dustin and Mary King ring in their wedding day by indulging in a couple of San Cristobal Coloso cigars at The Gastonian in Savannah, Georgia.



Smoking cigars on the water, friends Michael McGoldrick and Barry Abrams savor the good life off the coast of Long Island on a warm summer's day.



Bill Misiewicz celebrates his birthday by smoking a Padrón Serie 1926 at The Outlaw Cigar Co. in Kansas City, Missouri, alongside his son Mark and wife Sara.

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Gary Lake, Chris Olsen and John Dooley pause for a cigar break on Lake Winnepesaukee while traveling on their Harley Davidsons to Laconia, New Hampshire, for Laconia Bike Week.



It tends to get a bit nippy at 11,000 feet elevation. Grant Jackson, Charlie Raiford and Forrest Cook warm themselves up with premium cigars on their annual ski trip to Telluride, Colorado.



Friends Elie Zeitoune, Steve Sharabi, Brian Marcus, Abie Levi, Elliot Braha, Eli Zakay and Moe Maya enjoy their annual kosher steaks-and-cigars dinner at Club Macanudo in New York City.



Friends and family gather to celebrate the wedding of Ashley Dubin and Chris Marinaro by savoring libations and fine premium cigars at the Omni Hotel in New Haven, Connecticut.



Bride and groom Kristin Keith and Luke Friesen mark their wedding day by sharing excellent Cuban cigars with fine company at Sparkling Hills Resort in Vernon, British Columbia, Canada.



Andrew Hoffman, his father-in-law Tom Smith and Tom's brother David Smith, puff on a few Cohiba Edición Limitadas while on vacation in George Town, Cayman Islands.

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WARNING: Cigars contain many of the same carcinogens found in cigarettes, and cigars are not a safe substitute for smoking cigarettes. This product contains chemicals known to the State of California to cause cancer and birth defects and other reproductive harm.



Shane Hess, David Stewart, Michael Saper and Jeremy Pascotto savor My Father Le Bijou 1922 cigars while watching the pros at the Waste Management Phoenix Open in Scottsdale, Arizona.



While on vacation in the Republic of Panama, friends Mike Pendergrass and Geoff Gauger relax at the Balboa Yacht Club, enjoying fine cigars and watching the ships pass through the canal.



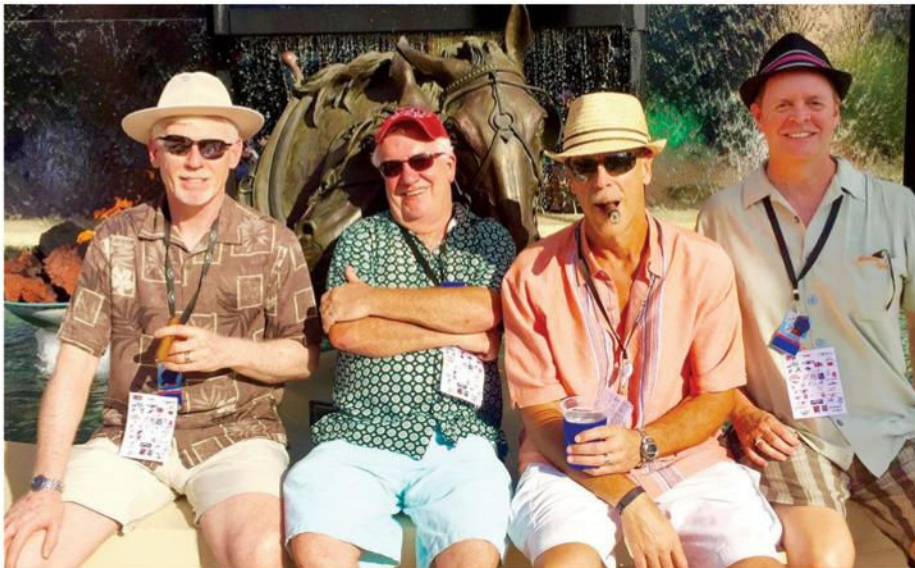
Dr. Michael Hagg and friends celebrate his marriage to Rosanna Falzone with premium cigars and libations during their September wedding at Appleford Estate in Villanova, Pennsylvania.



Ken Petrillo and Ken Petrillo Jr, savor father-and-son time over premium cigars while vacationing on St. George Island, Florida.



Matt and Mark Harris take in opening day at the races with a couple of fine cigars at the Del Mar racetrack in Del Mar, California.



Steve Horswood, Gene Galianese, Frank Nelson and Mark Congdon relax with premium cigars in hand at the sixth annual Cigar Bash sponsored by Tampa Humidor in Tampa, Florida.



Larry Earley spends some quality time with his sons, Andy, Jonathan and Rich, with an assortment of fine premium cigars on Andy's wedding day at the Summit Inn in Farmington, Pennsylvania.



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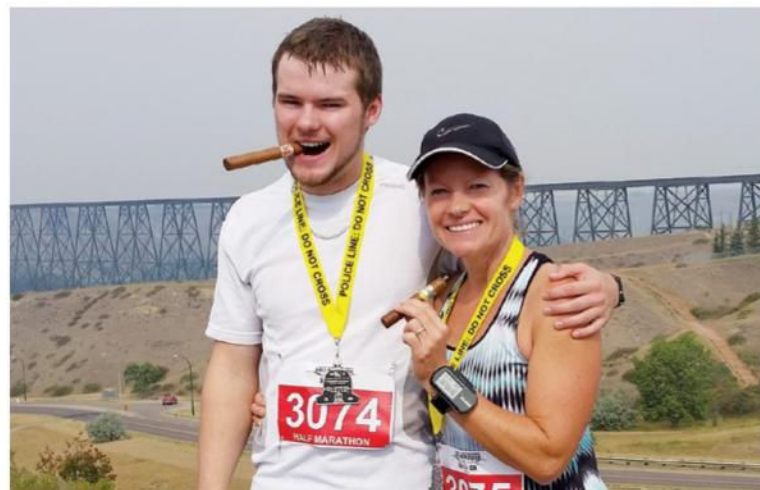
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'Tis the season for libations and fine cigars. Friends and coworkers celebrate the holidays at an ugly sweater-themed office party in Westport, Connecticut.



Mother and son Marcelle and Logan Cale celebrate completing a half marathon by puffing on Cuban cigars on a summer afternoon in Alberta, Canada.



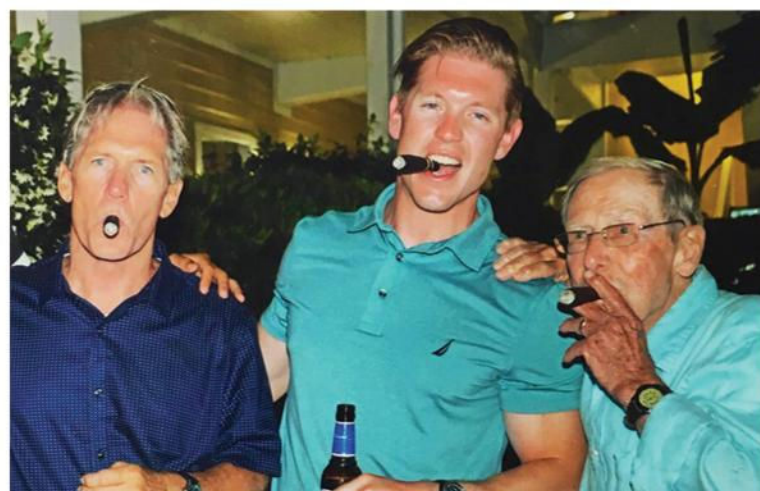
Levi Beery, Drake Allen and William Monzon celebrate the 240th anniversary of the United States Marine Corps by lighting up H. Upmann Magnum 46 cigars.



Father and son Lee and Marc Weissman spend quality time together in Hollywood Beach, Florida, while smoking a pair of Padrón Anniversary cigars.



While vacationing in Cuba, Ralph Frickel and his wife Lily savor Cuban cigars in front of a classic-car-turned-taxi outside of Ernest Hemingway's home.



Three generations of aficionados, Joseph H. Prater III, Joseph H. Prater IV and Joseph H. Prater Jr., savor maduro cigars together in Beaufort, North Carolina.

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3 STAY-ING PREPARED—EXUVIUS

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5 MANTIQUEING—M.S. RAU AND JEFF BRIDGMAN ANTIQUES

Because man does not live by big-screen TVs and fully stocked bars alone, you might want to consider the latest gentleman's pursuit for outfitting your man cave: mantiqueing. Not your run-of-the-mill, delicate, little Louis XIV figurine, mantiques are past relics with a masculine twist. For instance, M.S. Rau offers gaming the way it used to be: an Irish poker table, a vintage French foosball table and a horse-racing game. Jeff Bridgman American Antiques specializes in American flags, but also deals in American heritage pieces like furniture, carvings and game boards. jeffbridgman.com and rauantiques.com

6 HANDMADE SHADES—STATE OPTICAL

Sunglasses will ease the strain on your eyes on a sun-filled day. A sharp pair of shades, such as the Burnham frames, from Chicago-based State Optical, pictured (\$363) will extend your style quotient immensely. The renowned eyewear designer Blake Kuwahara conceives each piece before a team meticulously crafts them almost entirely by hand. With crystalline nose pads, lightweight, Italian-made acetate and Zeiss lenses, these sunglasses not only look and perform beautifully, but are comfortable, too. stateopticalco.com



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